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THE WHITE HOUSE MYSTERY

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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A White House Mystery;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S CASE FOR THE PRESIDENT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER AT THE WHITE HOUSE.

"The President will see you now, Mr. Carter."

Nick Carter put aside the paper he had been reading and passed into the private office of the Chief Executive, while the attendant closed the door softly behind him.

The President had already left his chair to receive the detective, and now he came forward with a quick stride and a hearty hand-clasp, using the other hand to slap Nick Carter cordially upon the shoulder as he exclaimed:

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Carter! Take that chair over there, and pull it a little this way."

"I hope I find you perfectly well," said the detective as he dropped into the chair.

"Oh, I am always well," was the reply, "It's part of the business of my life to be well and to keep well."

"And also to do well," said the detective, smiling.

"That is as it may be; if we do the best we can, I think we do well; and now, to business, Mr. Carter. I suppose you received my personal letter to you; the fact that you are here assures me of that."

"I did," replied the detective.

"It was impossible for me to be more explicit in a letter."

"I, of course, guess that much, sir."

The President wheeled his chair half-around and rested one arm upon the desk before him as he said:

"Mr. Carter, it is rather a delicate matter that I want you to undertake for me, and while, of course, it is an affair of the government, I prefer, for the present, at least, you should regard it as personal."

The detective nodded.

"I mean by that," continued the Executive, "that your employment is by me personally, as a man and a citizen, and not as an official."

"I understand."

"I suppose I need not ask for your assurance that I may rely absolutely on your discretion, but in a matter of this kind I believe that I ought to have it, but first, before you reply, let me explain what I mean by your discretion."

"Very well, sir."

"I mean that whatever conversations take place between you and me in relation to this affair must be treated as absolutely confidential, and that no person save ourselves must know that you are here or elsewhere, as the occa-

sion may be, in my interests. I want it understood that you have other business to bring you here or take you wherever you may go, and in order that such representation may be truthful, I would consider it advisable for you to really hatch up some other quasi case in addition to the one I give you."

"I think, sir, that you need have no fears on that ground at all. If you will tell me what it is you wish me to do, I will take care of the rest of it."

The President tapped the desk with the pencil he held in his hand and remained silent for a moment or two.

"I think it is best, Mr. Carter, to come directly to the point, then," he said.

"I think it is always best to do that," was the reply.

"The case in point, then, is this: There is a leak somewhere around here which I wish found and stopped. Information of the most private character has a way of getting out and becoming the property of others, or rather coming to the knowledge of others before its time. I have sought by every means in my power to ascertain where the leakage is, and I cannot find it, nor can the men—the secret service men—who are around me, succeed in doing so, although I must do them the justice to say that I have not been so frank with them as I intend to be with you, and have at no time taken any of them completely into my confidence."

The detective bowed an acknowledgment and made no other reply, and the President continued:

"The leakage to which I refer does not seem to be confined to one quarter of the mansion or to one locality in the capital. It seems, in fact, to be general, as if the whole bottom of the mansion were a sieve through which information makes its escape."

"Won't you tell me what it is that leaks out?" asked the detective; "I mean the character of it?"

"Certainly; I mean to tell you everything I know about it before I have finished."

"Thank you," said Nick. "It is always best to work in the open when it is possible to do so; and by working in the open I mean with the full confidence of one's employer."

"Decidedly so," said the President with emphasis.

"And now, Mr. President, if you will tell me as concisely as possible what is the matter and what you wish me to do about it, and permit me afterward to ask you some questions, many of which may possibly be what a lawyer would call leading, I think we can get at the gist of this matter without delay."

"The thing that is the matter," said the President, "is that whenever there is a private or a confidential conference between me and another person, no matter who that other person may chance to be, whether it is an officer of my cabinet or several of them, or if it be a senator or a congressman or several of them, or even if it is with a private citizen who has come here to consult with me upon some important matter, information concerning it somehow escapes, and I find things that I thought were absolutely unknown save to those who were concerned directly, have become almost public property long before information has been given out concerning them. Such things are extremely annoying, Mr. Carter. If they happened with one person or with two or three or half a dozen separate individuals besides myself, there might be an explanation found in the possible indiscretion of other parties. But the cases to which I refer cover almost without exception every private conference in which I have a personal interest, or, to put it more plainly, in which I personally engage. Of course, I know, myself, that the information does not leak through me, and of course I am almost equally positive so far as each of the other individuals concerned in them are responsible, that they are invariably as discreet as I am; I mean by that that I suspect nobody. So, Mr. Carter, it would seem that somewhere about the city there is a spy or there exists a spy system of which I am made the victim, and which is so skilfully handled that thus far it has not only defied all my efforts to discover it, but has obviously succeeded in its aims."

"It is rather a remarkable state of affairs," said the detective.

"It is so remarkable that it has become intolerable. I have appealed to you because I believe that you are better calculated to discover the secret of it than any one else."

"That is very kind of you," said Nick.

"Understand me, Mr. Carter, I am not paying you a compliment in saying that, for I didn't refer in my statement to your personal ability at all; I only referred to the fact that you are not now connected with the secret service of the government, and that your business very rarely calls you to this city."

The detective nodded.

"Mr. Carter," continued the President, leaning a little forward, while his face took on that fierceness of expression which his natural intensity sometimes gives it, "only yesterday there were three gentlemen here to see me—only yesterday, mind you; and we held a conference which lasted possibly half an hour. The matters that we discussed between us had reference to the present activity of the Interstate Commerce Commission. The three gentlemen who were with me at the time were as anxious to keep the purposes of our meeting from the world as I was and am. Far from being to the interest of any one of them to disclose anything that occurred between us at that meeting, it is decidedly to the interests of all of them that nothing whatever should be said about it at the present time, and for at least a month to come. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

"Perfectly."

"This morning, between sixteen and twenty hours after

that conference took place, a member of Congress met me on the road when I was taking my morning walk, and we stopped to chat together for a moment.

"During the conversation that ensued between us, he mentioned almost inadvertently, it would seem from his manner, that he understood so and so, and thus and so—I am not concealing the facts from you; I will come to that part presently—and, in fact, used words which would indicate that he had especial knowledge concerning the facts that were discussed at that conference to which I have referred.

"Understand me, I do not imply that he had knowledge of the conference itself, or that the conference took place, or that he knew who was present at it, but I do state positively that he did know, or did seem to know, that such and such things had been discussed, and that this move and that move on the chess-board of state were in serious contemplation."

"I will ask you for the name of the congressman presently," said the detective.

"I will give it to you when the time comes, Mr. Carter, although I do not now believe that the man realizes the importance of what he was telling me. In other words, I don't think he was aware of the fact that he was the possessor of a secret. The very openness of his manner, as well as the character of his communication to me at the time, precludes any such thought as that."

"All the more reason why, through him, I might be able to obtain my source of information."

"That," continued the President, "brings us back to the point of leakage—I cannot think of another apt word to use in this relation."

"Where was that conference held?" asked the detective.

"On the front porch—the south front—of the White House; over at one end of it. I don't know that you would exactly call it a porch, but that is the way we refer to it here."

"Some people would call it a piazza, and others a veranda," said Nick, laughing; "but I believe it was originally named the porch. At what hour of the day?"

"Half-past nine in the morning."

"There were three present besides yourself?"

"Yes."

"The obvious question here," said Nick, "or rather questions, that might be asked, would be those to which you must have already given your attention and to which you would now reply in the negative; nevertheless, I will ask them."

"As you please."

"They are: Were you near windows behind which listeners might have been concealed, and was there a shelter of some sort anywhere near at hand beneath the porch or round it, and was there any attendant or servant near enough to you at any time to have overheard even a part of your conversation?"

"To all of which," replied the President, "I answer in the negative."

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS SPY SYSTEM.

The President drew a pad of paper toward him, and with his pencil wrote rapidly upon it, after which he passed it to the detective.

"I have written there," he said; "first, the names of the three gentlemen with whom I held that conference. Second, the subject—that is, the principal subject that was under discussion at the time, which I take it is all that you care to know."

"Yes."

"Third, the name of the member of Congress I met this morning, who had somehow been made so wise. I will ask you to look them over for a moment, and then to destroy the paper, depending upon your memory for future reference to them."

Nick Carter devoted merely a glance to the names, then quietly tore the paper into little bits, separating the written names, letter by letter, as he did so, and finally dropping the heap into the waste-basket.

"You have told me, already, Mr. President," he said after a moment, "that this sort of thing has been going on for a considerable time."

"Yes, for months."

"And that almost without exception every conference that you hold is somehow reported elsewhere."

"Exactly that."

"Where do you usually hold these conferences?"

The President shrugged his broad shoulders and laughed.

"Everywhere," he said. "I am not given to cabinet secrecy as a rule, and very little to sitting behind closed doors. If a man has an important matter to discuss with me, we are as likely to talk about it here or on the porch or in the grounds, or in any one of my offices, or on horseback, as to make a set occasion of it and retire to any particular privacy."

"Then, I am to understand that these matters have not been reported more from one place than from another?"

"No. From everywhere."

"But your reply of a moment ago gave me to understand that conversations between you and another that had occurred while you were on horseback had also somehow been overheard and reported."

"No; hardly that," laughed the President. "The spy would have to be a good rider and a silent one as well as a swift one to accomplish any such endeavor as that one would be. I merely referred to the fact that I do sometimes hold important discussions under such circumstances, in order to impress upon you that I have no

set places for indulging in any of them. They occur wherever I happen to be, as, for instance, this one with you now. This is, of course, my personal private office, into which nobody intrudes unless asked to do so by me—and yet," with another expressive shrug of the shoulders and a tightening of the jaws, "I must confess to you that it would not surprise me at all if by this time to-morrow it would be generally known that I have called Nick Carter to the White House for a conference, and have engaged him for personal service."

Since the beginning of the conversation—that is, since the moment when Nick comprehended the character of it—he had studied the interior of the room with considerable care, so that now he replied, with a confident smile:

"I feel quite confident, Mr. President, that no one is listening to us at this moment."

The President laughed aloud.

"You cannot feel more confident of that fact than I have been many times in the past, only to find later that I was mistaken," he said.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Carter, the leakage has become so general that for a long time I have made it a point to investigate quite thoroughly my surroundings before beginning a conversation which I do not care to have overheard, yet, nevertheless, they have been overheard many times."

"Even under those circumstances?"

"Yes."

"Will you mention another specific instance?"

"The day before yesterday we held a cabinet meeting. At the close of that meeting, two members of the cabinet remained with me to continue the matter which we had under discussion. We remained in the cabinet-room. The things we talked about were intended for our own ears alone. I am confident that neither of those gentlemen would mention anything that took place, any more than I would do it, and yet on the following morning the *Post* contained almost a detailed reference to it, and in fact printed our conversation."

"That was in the cabinet-room?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. President, we have had the porch of the White House and the cabinet-room. Give me another specific instance."

"Two weeks ago, approximately, a senator from the Western States sent word to me, through his secretary, that he would appreciate it if I would make an appointment with him to talk over a certain matter which he named. I made the appointment and he kept it. I received him in this room, and he sat in the chair where you are sitting now, and under almost the same circumstances that surround us at the present moment. Aside from my confidence in the senator, which is perfect, it would have been, and is now, against his interests to have the matters we discussed at that time disclosed, yet, Mr. Carter, they did become known, indeed what you might call publicly, but the very men or set of men from whom he wished most eagerly to keep the matter a secret, knew in less than forty-eight hours not only of our meeting, but what had passed between us.

"It is perhaps ludicrous, but the fact remains that the result of it was, that while I am not so confident of the senator as I was before that time, and no doubt he has lost part of his faith in me, notwithstanding that, at heart and in fact, neither of us believe that the other has betrayed the confidence."

Again the President drew the pad toward him, and again he scratched upon it with his pencil, and passed it toward the detective, as he had done before, and once more the detective, after absorbing the contents of what was written there, destroyed the memorandum. It had contained the name of the senator and the character of the discussion referred to. (For obvious reasons, the reader must understand that names cannot be given here.)

"Can you give me other specific citations, Mr. President?"

"Yes; any quantity of them."

"Will you please do so?"

"I called several weeks ago, informally and only because I was passing the house at the time, upon one of the ambassadors at his residence. The call was not made by appointment; he had no expectation of seeing me there, nor I of going there up to the moment I actually turned in toward the doorway. Until he received me I had no notion that he wished to do so particularly, but it happened that he had that morning received a communication—what is called an 'autograph letter' by the way—from his imperial master, which he desired to discuss with me, and he was at the moment of my entrance about to send a message to the White House asking for an appointment with me."

"Your calling there might be construed by some people as the working of telepathy," remarked the detective.

"As soon as I appeared," continued the President, ignoring the remark, "the ambassador took me into his private cabinet, exhibited the letter to me, unofficially, mind you, and asked me to discuss it with him informally. I did so, and remained there with him possibly an hour."

"The following morning I received a communication from him by one of his special messengers, which contained this question: 'Have you by any chance mentioned to any person the matter we discussed yesterday at my house?'"

"It goes without saying, Mr. Carter, that I had not, but as this was exactly in line with so many other mysterious occurrences, I took occasion, the next time I mounted my horse, to ride past his house and actually

called him out so that we might talk together out of doors.

"I asked him what had occurred to occasion such a question as that, and he replied that the information had been given to him from another embassy in the city; that concerning the autograph letter he had received from his master the previous morning, its contents were known, and the fact that I had discussed it with him and the substance of what had taken place between us, were also known."

"It is most remarkable," said the detective.

"It certainly is, Mr. Carter; it would seem as if some spy followed me about; some unsuspected eavesdropper, who could even pursue me on one of my walks and follow me into the privacy of an ambassador's cabinet when I made a personal call."

"I presume," said the detective, "that these are all extreme cases that you have mentioned to me."

"All that have occurred might be said to be extreme cases, Mr. Carter."

The detective was silent for a considerable time, during which he paced the room thoughtfully. When he resumed his seat he said:

"I will ask you now, Mr. President, to recall, if you can, one of the incidents among the many which have occurred where a private conversation has been reported or has leaked out, in which there was a possible chance for an eavesdropper to be present which you, yourself, might have recognized, if not at the time, then since it occurred."

"I recall only one such."

"Where did it happen?"

"In my carriage."

"Where and when and how?"

"I had stepped from the train at the Pennsylvania Station and walked to my carriage, which was waiting for me; as we drove from Sixth Street to Pensylvania Avenue, I saw one of the secretaries of legation to one of the embassies here, walking on the avenue, and when he bowed to me, we drove up to the curb and I spoke to him. He came to the carriage and I invited him to enter. He declined, but asked me if I would receive him the next day on a matter of considerable personal importance to him. I agreed to do so and named the hour for two in the afternoon. The morning papers of that morning contained the announcement of that appointment."

"That is very simply accounted for," answered the detective. "It is more than likely that one of the newspaper men, passing at the time, overheard you, or that your secretary, with whom you talked, mentioned it inadvertent to some one later in the day."

"Very true," said the President. "I believe there might have been an eavesdropper."

The detective left his chair again and was on the point of proceeding with the questions he was to ask of the President, when there was a tap at the door and a card was brought to the Chief Executive.

He glanced at it, and then said:

"This gentleman is here by appointment, Mr. Carter, and I am going to ask you to return to me at nine o'clock this evening, when we can continue this conversation to any lengths we please without any fear of interruption."

"Very well," said Nick, "I'll do that," and he took his departure at once.

CHAPTER III.

THE SENATOR FROM THE WEST.

When the detective left the White House, he crossed Lafayette Square directly to the Arlington Hotel and entered there, taking a seat near one of the front windows, so that he could look occasionally out upon Connecticut Avenue while he glanced over the morning paper, which he had neglected to buy until then.

The time was shortly before the luncheon hour and Nick upon his arrival at Washington that morning had gone straight to the Arlington, where he registered and had a room assigned to him, although at the time he did not know whether he was to remain in the capital city more than a few hours.

While he was seated there looking out across the Avenue toward H Street, he saw approaching across the asphalted pavement the very same senator whose name the President had that very morning written on a sheet of paper for Nick Carter's benefit, which sheet the reader will remember, had thereafter been destroyed. It happened that the senator in question was well known to the detective, who had served him on one occasion in the city of his home in the far West, before he became a senator, and it is worthy of remark here that the detective held the man in quite as high esteem as did the President of the United States. Nick knew that the senator was absolutely reliable in all things pertaining to business, social, or political confidences, and was as confident as the President had been that there could have been no leakage through him of their private conversation.

As the senator approached the entrance to the hotel, Nick arose and passed around through the corridor so that he met him at the doorway, and they clasped hands cordially in greeting of each other.

"Glad to see you, Carter," remarked the senator heartily. "What brings you to Washington at this time?"

"The same sort of thing that takes me elsewhere about the country," replied Nick, laughing.

"Let's find a couple of chairs somewhere and sit down," said the senator. "I'd like to have a chat with you."

"That's the very thing I was hoping you'd propose," said the detective, and he piloted the way back to the window where he had been before, and where there were two chairs facing each other.

"Down here on detective business, I suppose, Carter?" inquired the senator in his breezy Western manner.

"Oh, yes," said Nick, "I'm always on business in one way or another."

"Business of state this time?"

"Hardly that, senator."

"None of my business, anyhow."

"Well, I didn't like to say that, you know."

"Oh, I appreciated it before I asked the question just the same as though I hadn't said it, but the point is I was approaching, through that manner, another point."

"All right," said Nick, "what is it?"

"I was going to ask you if your business is too important or too fleeting to prevent you from undertaking a little matter for me while you are here; that is, if you will be here long enough."

"I think I might do it for you, senator," responded the detective, who saw in this incident the opportunity to accomplish what the President had suggested; that is, that he should have two irons in the fire while he was in Washington, and really, if it were possible to do so, undertake some other case than that one which the President had given him.

"The fact is, Carter," pursued the senator, after a moment's pause, during which he knit his brows and chewed savagely upon his cigar. "That I have been deeply incensed and annoyed at a circumstance which occurred recently, and since the occurrence have been more than once on the point of wiring you or calling you up on the telephone in New York to ask you to come here."

"So serious as that, senator?"

"Well, it may not sound very serious to you when you hear about it, but it is most serious to me. It is a very trivial matter and a very personal one, also an exceedingly annoying one."

"I'll do what I can to help you, senator."

"Oh, I know that, Carter; at least, I feel sure of it. You see I haven't forgotten the remarkable success you made of that case you had for our company in the West, and so when I needed the services of an expert in your line, I naturally thought of you."

"I suppose so."

"Carter, do you know anything about the political spy systems of foreign countries?"

"I knew a little about them," admitted the detective.

"Those of Russia and France?"

"Yes."

"Russian, more particularly?"

"Yes, I have had considerable to do with that, although if in speaking of the two countries, you speak of the excellence of their spy system, if I may abuse the word excellence so far, that of France far exceeds Russia."

The senator snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"I don't care a fig about either of them," he said. "I am not interested in Russia or in France or Japan or Timbuctoo, save so far as questions concerning them come up for discussion in the Senate occasionally."

"What is there about it that does interest you, senator?"

"I have been wondering, Carter, if it were possible for either of the countries I have named or for any one of the foreign countries to have transplanted a slip or a shoot of their very thrifty spy systems to this country."

"Quite so, senator."

"Eh, Carter? Do you mean that?"

"Most certainly."

"Do you mean that those foreigners would dare to chuck down a swarm of spies on us, here in Washington?"

"They certainly would dare to do it if they thought necessity required it," replied the detective. "The only question is, would they regard matters and affairs here of sufficient importance to do so?"

"Well, one of them has done that very thing, Carter."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"What makes you so certain of it, senator?"

"Because on more than one occasion I am convinced that I have been spied upon and watched. My private conversations have been reported, and affairs of the utmost secrecy, which I believed to be perfectly inviolate, have been somehow made known to others, and to the very people whom I least wished to become cognizant of them."

"For instance——?" asked the detective.

"Well, for instance—look here, Carter, this conversation between us is absolutely confidential, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"I don't want a living soul to know that I have talked with you about it."

"No one shall know it from me."

"Very well, then; for instance, as you say, I had a talk with the President not very long ago upon a point of no particularly vital importance, and yet it was one which I wished to keep under cover for the present."

"I understand," said Nick.

"We discussed the matter, the President and I, in a very low tone, far removed from any other person, and in a manner which, I am convinced in my own mind thoroughly, could not have been overheard, and yet, Carter, it was overheard almost word for word, and it was repeated afterward in a way that was very unpleasant, to say the least, to me."

"Such things are annoying," said the detective mildly, more by way of filling in a pause than anything else.

"Annoying! I should say they were! Such things make you doubt your best friends. Such things almost make a senator doubt the President of the United States, and I don't think I exaggerate when I say that such things must certainly make the President of the United States doubt a senator who has had such an experience with him."

"I don't think the President would be inclined to doubt you, senator."

"Nor do I, Carter, but there are the facts just as I have stated them. The conversation was confidential. We were both agreed that no mention should be made of it by either party to any other person without the previous knowledge of the other. Mention was made of it, and mention, moreover, which certified that it was correct. Now, Carter, I ask you how are you going to account for it?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"It is a proposition, senator, which I cannot answer offhand."

"Will you undertake to find out about it for me?"

"I will make the effort."

"Carter, I am a rich man, as you know, and I tell you right now that if I could spot the fellow that did that eavesdropping, I'd give up ten thousand dollars without a wink."

"We won't go into the question of reward for the present," smiled the detective. "You might tell me, though, if there have been other instances where you believe you have been spied upon."

"Yes! There have been dozens of them."

"Indeed? Where and when and how?"

"Everywhere and almost always. Whenever I attempt to hold a confidential conversation with any person, but when you ask me how, I give it up."

"Have you heard other senators complain of this sort of thing?" asked Nick.

"Specifically no; in the abstract, yes. That is to say, I know that several of them have been puzzled by occurrences not unlike the one I have described to you."

"Senator, when you opened this conversation, why did you refer to the spy system of foreign countries and particularly of Russia and France?"

"For no particular reason, Carter, save that I have always been given to understand that the Russian spy system is the most complete in the world, and it has occurred to me more than once that possibly they have established a branch of it over here, and sometimes give out information they receive through it when it is not to their interests to keep it quiet."

"Have you noticed at any time any one dogging your steps, senator?"

"Never."

"Have you had occasion to suspect any particular person of showing more than a usual interest in your affairs?"

"No."

"You are not conscious of having been followed or having been spied upon personally at any time?"

"Never once."

"Can you refer to any other particular incident than the one with the President?"

"Yes," said the senator. "I can refer to one, but it must be most mightily confidential."

"I think you can rely upon that."

"Very well; it happened like this: A few days ago I was passing through one of the avenues of the city on foot when an attaché of one of the legations came down the steps of the house, stopped me, told me that the ambassador had seen me approaching, and would be glad if I would step inside for a moment.

"I did so, of course. He met me just inside the door and personally conducted me to his private room, and there he brought up a matter of some personal interest—understand me, it was not a government matter—concerning which he wished me to speak confidentially to an acquaintance of mine or, to be entirely frank with you, to another senator, and to ask that senator to call upon him that same evening, if he could do so.

"I consented and left the house; I was not there in all ten minutes. By way of coincidence, it was less than half an hour after that when I met on the street the other senator to whom I was to convey the ambassador's message, and I stopped him in the middle of the sidewalk on Pennsylvania Avenue and in three minutes had told him all that I had to say."

The senator leaned back in his chair, thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and chewed savagely upon his cigar, while he stared at the detective for a moment in silence, and then he said emphatically:

"And I'll be hanged, Carter, if the whole blooming thing wasn't in the paper the next morning."

"Didn't the other senator give it out?" asked Nick.

"I know he didn't, because he wouldn't have dared."

"Why not?"

"It would have injured him personally as well as politically, and would have called up very serious questions in the Senate itself that other senators would have asked him. It would have done so, anyway, if he hadn't taken the floor the first moment he could after the Senate was called to order, read out the report in the paper, and denied the whole blooming thing from beginning to end."

The detective pondered a moment.

"Was anybody benefited, I mean particularly benefited, by the publication of that information?" he asked presently.

"Not a soul on earth, Carter."

"Its only effect, then, was to injure the senator in question?"

"It didn't even do that for the reason that he replied to any questions that might be asked before the Senate as a body had taken cognizance of it."

"The question arises, then," said the detective, "what incentive the people who were spying may have in disseminating such news."

"I have thought of that myself."

The detectitve left his chair and stood with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets, regarding the senator so quizzically and with such a curious smile on his face that the statesman became uneasy under the scrutiny, and presently exclaimed:

"What the devil are you looking at, Carter?"

"I was looking at you, senator. I was just turning over in my mind a thought that occurred to me. It may seem absurd to you when I mention it, but the more I look at you the more confident I become that I can make the idea work. Has it ever struck you, senator, that we are almost identically of the same physique?"

"No, it hadn't, but now that you mention it, I see that we are."

"Senator, if I could make myself up sufficiently well to impersonate you so that it would be possible for me to deceive others—that is, to make them think that I am you—would you be willing that I should do so for the sake of this investigation you wish me to make?"

"Certainly, Carter, but as you say, the thing is absurd."

"I don't think so, senator, but if you will come up to my room with me, we will make the effort and see what comes of it."

CHAPTER IV.

A TRANSFORMATION SCENE.

Nick Carter and the senator could not be said to even bear resemblance to each other, for if one passed them on the street together or separately, it would never occur to that person to liken one to the other in that respect.

And yet there was a likeness sufficient for the purposes and for the art of Nick Carter.

This likeness consisted only in the facts that both men were smooth shaven; almost exactly the same height, and were built so nearly on the same plan that the clothing of one might have very well fitted the other.

Their voices, however, were entirely dissimilar; there was not a single movement or gesture that belonged to them in common nor a facial expression; and the senator was a man at least a third older than the detective, but these differences were of little moment to Nick Carter, for they were such that could be easily overcome by the consummate art he exercised in his ability at making up.

When they reached the detective's room, Nick said to the senator:

"I don't suppose you ever went through an experience of this kind before, did you?"

"I don't know what the experience may be," replied the senator.

"I have brought you up here to try, if it is possible, for me to steal your personality, or rather to assume it for a time and do it sufficiently well so that the people who seem to be interested in watching you may mistake me for you."

The senator narrowed his eyes and smiled rather grimly as he replied:

"The proposition, Carter, seems to me to be utterly absurd on the face of it; of course I have read of such things; I have read that a detective, to be expert at his craft, must have the ability to assume disguises almost at will, and to create them so expertly that no suspicion would arise in the mind of another regarding the imposture, but I will be quite frank with you in saying that I never believed such a thing possible."

"This shall be my opportunity, then, of convincing you of your error," said Nick, smiling.

"I can understand," continued the senator, "how a person might make himself up as a negro or a Chinaman and pass muster as such if he were not compelled to undergo too close an inspection, but when you assume that you can transform yourself into a representation of me and do it sufficiently well to deceive persons who know me—why the thing is too absurd for argument."

"Still you have no objection to my making the effort, have you, senator?"

"None whatever, if it will amuse you."

"I think it will amuse me and possibly you, if you wish me to investigate this matter for you."

"Go ahead, then, I am ready; only, first, I would like to ask a question or two."

"Very well."

"Suppose you do succeed in accomplishing this amazing thing, will there be two senior senators from my State walking around the streets of Washington, or are you going to bottle me up somewhere or lock me up and keep me out of sight while you are playing the rôle of statesman?"

"We'll arrange that," said Nick, "after we have inspected how well I can accomplish the first and most necessary part of the matter; and now, senator, if you will sit over there, please, in that chair beside the mirror, I'll proceed."

The detective produced his make-up box and from it took the pigments and other accessories necessary to his task, and having stripped himself of his coat, waistcoat, and shirt, he began working so expeditiously and so expertly that the senator speedily forgot to talk in the undisguised interest he felt in the proceeding. Bit by bit he saw a copy of himself created; he saw Nick Carter's nose turn from a straight Grecian one into the

pronounced feature which has been called "Roman." He saw the lines that time and care and study had placed upon his face reproduced upon Nick Carter's; he saw perfect reproductions of his own gray and shaggy eyebrows presently cover and conceal the detective's; he saw little deft touches made with the point of a delicate camel's hair brush around the detective's eyes, putting a line here or creating a shadow there, until not only was the exact expression reproduced, but the effect was almost to change the coloring of the eyes themselves, for there was not a marked difference, happily, in the coloring of the irises of the two men. From an assortment of wigs the detective carried in his bag he made the eyebrows, and with his wigs and pigments and the deft touches of which he was master, he transformed his own face bit by bit, and step by step, into a reproduction, or rather into a copy of the senator's, and did it so expertly that the statesman's amazement grew and grew as he watched the proceeding.

And at last when it was completed; when Nick had adjusted a wig of shaggy iron-gray hair of almost leonine suggestion; had given a last finishing touch and twist to the eyebrows, which were not unlike Mark Twain's, and had even gone to the extent of coloring parts of three of his teeth to represent gold fillings exactly like the senator, the latter could contain himself no longer, but exclaimed with a chuckling laugh:

"My long-lost brother!"

"Good, you think, eh, senator?"

"Good! Why it's perfect!"

"I wonder, now," said Nick, "if I could persuade you to lend me your clothes; you were probably seen to enter the hotel, and in order to look exactly like you as possible, I must wear the clothing that you now have on."

"Nothing easier," answered the senator, who had now entered heartily into the undertaking, and aside from the serious side of it, regarded it as one of the best jokes he had ever assisted in perpetrating.

Already, in his own imagination, he was creating unnumbered scenes and incidents by which he could "play it" splendidly upon some of his friends as a result of this disguise.

For the senator from the West, be it known, was a great humorist, and was never tired of putting up jokes on his associates in the halls of Congress.

The detective laid out a suit of his own from his bag for the use of the senator, and then the last part of the transformation began, so that within another half-hour it seemed as if the two men had entirely changed places save only in the features of the senator himself, which thus far Nick Carter had not played upon with his consummate art.

But when Nick had finished dressing and was arrayed in the rather pronounced collar and tie of the senator, who was just a little bit inclined to be foppish; when the statesman's diamond gleamed from it and when every touch that could be thought of by the detective had been applied to the disguise, it is safe to say that the statesman's most intimate friends would have been deceived, and now the detective exhibited another of his remarkable talents.

He strode across the room to the farthest corner, and then, turning abruptly, approached the senator again slowly, laughing and talking as he came and so exactly mimicking, not only the gestures and the mannerisms of the senator, but also so perfectly simulating his voice that the latter was speechless with amazement.

"By jingo, Carter," he exclaimed presently; "you are a wonder!"

"Do you think I will pass muster?" asked Nick.

"Pass muster! You'd pass anywhere! By Jove, Nick, I'm glad I'm an old bachelor or there might be another case of mistaken identity for the yellow journals to get hold of."

"Now," said Nick, "the question arises, what are we going to do with you?"

"I was just wondering about that myself."

"I couldn't very well make you up to represent me, senator, without trimming down those beautiful eyebrows of yours and trimming your hair short as I wear mine, after which it would have to be dyed——"

"That will do, Carter; we'll draw the line at that, please."

"So I think, senator, that I'll just fix you up according to my ideas of how one of your numerous constituents from the wild and woolly West might look if he came to Washington to look you up in pursuit of a postmastership. I don't suppose you will be opposed to being dressed up for a day or two, will you?"

"Not at all, Carter, if you think I will pass."

"Of course I can do it."

"You must not forget that I can't change my voice the way you can yourself. This one I've carried around with me always, and I've been accustomed to use it considerably. There have been those who have told me I use it too much."

But Nick presently went to work upon the face of the senator, and without putting him to great inconvenience, transformed it little by little until there was almost no resemblance left to the statesman himself. He darkened the eyebrows; built out the tip of the nose until that organ was made straight and incidentally considerably larger; and he decorated the senator's chin with a tuft of bristling whiskers, which made the transformation complete.

"There!" exclaimed Nick, when he had finished, "I think that will do, senator. I think you can go around where you please to-day and pass yourself off under the name of Hiram Hawkins or any other one you choose.

from any town in your own State you care to select, and while there will be many to suggest that you look like the senator, and while later on some of your friends may joke you about having a constituent who looks like you, I don't think that anybody will suspect that you are really you."

The senator threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"By Jove, Carter," he cried, "I have got a day off and I'm going to make the most of it, and I'd like to make a bet with you before we start out."

"What is it?" asked Nick.

"I'll bet you a hundred dollar bill that you daren't walk up to the United States Senate and go in there and take my seat."

"That," said Nick, "is exactly what I intend to do."

"What! Go to the Senate and take my seat?"

"Sure thing."

"But how the dev——?"

"I don't intend to keep the seat very long," interrupted the detective, "it will be sufficient that I went into the Senate chamber and occupied your seat for a few minutes. I would like to suggest to a few that may be hanging around there that I have an appointment with the President or one of the ambassadors, or, in a word, senator, I want to induce these fellows who are spying on you to follow me, if I can."

At this the senator laughed so immoderately that he was compelled to drop into a chair, and he continued that laughter to such lengths that the detective finally asked him what amused him.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I am going to the Senate, too, but I shall walk around to the visitor's gallery and take a seat there; and think of the joy of it, Carter; just think of it; to sit there in the visitor's gallery and see myself enter the Senate chamber and occupy my seat."

Ten minutes later the detective, in his impersonation of the senator from the West, walked slowly out of the Arlington Hotel and boarded an H Street car for the Capitol.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF TWO JAPS.

When the detective walked into the Capitol, it was not long before he began to encounter people who called out to him the usual greetings of the day under the impression that he was the senator from the West, and he was careful to return each greeting in the senator's cordial manner, so that he passed on without incident of any importance, until he entered at the door of the Senate chamber and passed down to the senator's seat, the location of which he knew perfectly well.

One of the senators from another State arose from his own seat and came entirely across the chamber to shake hands with him and to whisper a question or two, the answers to which Nick could not possibly know, but he managed to reply evasively, and by pretending that he was greatly preoccupied, to defer further discussion until later, and so he passed half an hour at the senator's desk, seated among a body of men where he had no right to be at all, and from among whom he would have been instantly expelled had his identity been guessed.

Several of the members of the body approached him during this interval to speak to him or to ask questions, and Nick was not sorry when presently one of the pages brought him a card.

Glancing at the bit of pasteboard in his hand, Nick read a Japanese name, and for a moment he was in doubt whether it would be policy for him to receive and talk with this person who had called to interview the senator. He did not know and could not know if the two were known to each other, but presently, determined to carry off the part he was playing to the utmost limit that was possible, he left his seat and passed out of the chamber into the corridor of the Capitol, where the Japanese gentleman was awaiting him, and here, still holding the card in his hand, he addressed the man in that negative sort of way which might have inferred that he either knew the man or that he did not know him, as the other might choose to accept it.

"Possibly," thought the detective, "if the senator is known to this chap, the man may regard the statesman as decidedly cool to-day."

It proved, however, that the meeting was not one to give him any uneasiness whatever, for he speedily discovered that the Japanese was a stranger and one who had merely called to invite the senator to attend a dinner that was to be given three evenings later at the Hotel Willard by this very person. Nick gathered from the conversation that the senator knew the Japanese perfectly well by name without having met him before, and he surmised from the short conversation that ensued that there were some matters between them which the senator had expressed some interest in. He readily consented to be present at the dinner, and so got rid of the Japanese gentleman, after which, instead of going to the committee-room, as the senator would have done, he called a page and sent him there with a message to the effect that he was not feeling exactly well that day and was leaving the Capitol at once. Then he walked out through the west front of the Capitol and descended the steps to Pennsylvania Avenue, after which he strolled leisurely along the north side of the avenue toward the treasury department. All this time the detective was keenly on the alert to discover if he had been observed and was being followed, but it was not until he paused for a moment, tentatively, in front of the Hotel Raleigh, that he became convinced that he was. The word convinced is used advisedly, although under different circumstances the detective would not

have even suspected that he was being trailed; that is to say, if he had not been looking for it, he would not have discovered it, but believing that the senator had for some reason, that was still unknown to the detective, arrived at a point in his affairs where he was under constant espionage, the detective did not doubt that he was himself the object of close surveillance.

Moreover, the persons who seemed to be doing the trailing—Nick figured that there were three of them—excited the detective's interest. They were Japanese, and this fact, coupled with the call he had received at the Senate from the man, Mustushimi, was the first circumstance that had come to Nick Carter's hands that might be regarded as a possible clue to the mysteries he was trying to solve. He recalled now, that at least two of the incidents that had been related to him, one by the President and one by the senator, where spies had been at work, had to do with an ambassador to the United States, and that in both cases that ambassador had represented the Eastern Empire, which has lately become so important a factor in diplomatic affairs. For a moment, while the detective stood there in front of the Hotel Raleigh, he believed that he saw the first part of the solution of his problem clearly outlined, for it was exactly in keeping with the known characteristics of the Japanese people that they should resort to a spy system for their inside information, and who, among all the peoples of the earth, Nick asked himself, would be more competent to create a perfect system of that kind than the Japanese?

While he stood there on the corner near the Raleigh he saw a gentleman approaching him in some haste, with the evident intention of speaking to him, and although the man was unknown to him, he waited. The unknown person approached with extended hand and exclaimed, with considerable cordiality:

"How are you, senator? This is indeed a fortunate meeting. I was just on my way to the Capitol to look you up."

"Yes?" said Nick, non-committally.

"Has Mustushimi been to see you to-day, senator?"

"Yes, he was at the Capitol a half-hour ago."

"And he asked you to a dinner at the Willard?"

"Yes."

"You will attend, of course?"

"I told him that I would do so."

"You see, senator, that it is extremely important that you should be there. Our men are very anxious indeed to have you understand this matter thoroughly, and they can think of no way in which it can be put before you just as it should be as well as that one."

"All right," said Nick.

"You know, of course, senator, that the matter is still treated in a very confidential way; nothing has been permitted to get out about it at all, and there will be present at the dinner only——"

"Yes, I understand," said Nick, "that'll be all right. I think you can count upon seeing me at the dinner."

The detective did not care about the particulars that were to be discussed at that dinner, and he did not wish to be drawn too deeply into the conversation with the slight knowledge he had of the senator's affairs, so he purposely cut the man off rather abruptly, and dismissed him without permitting the other one to realize that he had been dismissed.

But all the while, during this conversation, Nick Carter had kept his eyes fixed upon the two Japs who he thought were following him, rather than upon the man to whom he was talking, and he had noticed that they watched him and his companion with curious intentness throughout the continuance of that dialogue.

At no time were either of them near enough to overhear a word that had been spoken, and yet not once had they taken their eyes from his face and the face of the man who had addressed him on the corner.

Nick strolled on again and presently entered the Willard, where he dropped into one of the leather-covered chairs near the window and lighted a cigar.

He had placed himself so that his back was toward the wall, and being almost in one corner of the great room he had every door of entrance to it within his range of vision. He was not surprised when presently he saw two Japs enter the hotel through the long corridor that leads down from the F Street entrance. They were not the same ones whom Nick had seen on Pennsylvania Avenue and who had watched him there, but from the keen glances they cast in his direction from the moment they entered the office room of the hotel, Nick knew that they had the same interest in him that the others had shown.

"This is rapidly become a decidedly interesting game," he mused, watching them as they crossed to two chairs that were side by side facing the one in which the detective was seated. Nick was still watching them furtively and with a great deal of curiosity, trying to surmise some reason why the senator should be watched by the Japanese, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder and was aware that a man who had approached from the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance had already addressed him.

"How are you, senator?" he said, and then without waiting for an invitation, he drew another chair forward so that it was close beside Nick's, and seated himself upon it.

As the detective answered the salutation, he glanced again toward the two Japs who were at least thirty feet away from him and who could not be expected to overhear a word that might be uttered between this newcomer and Nick.

"But, nevertheless, Nick perceived that they were suddenly alert, and that both of them were watching eagerly and with riveted attention every motion that was made by himself and the gentleman who had just accosted him. It was a puzzling circumstance and one for the moment he could not fathom. He had only got so far as to surmise that the Japanese were at the bottom of the spy system that had been complained about to him, but thus far he had not discovered a single Jap or in fact any person at all who seemed to be listening to anything that was said. They had only been watching.

Determined to observe them closely, and believing that he could best draw them out by engaging in some conversation with the man who was now seated beside him, he said, still keeping his eyes furtively upon the Japs:

"What is new with you, to-day?"

The stranger, for Nick had not the least idea who he might be, shrugged his shoulders and replied, using a popular expression:

"I'd like very much to know, senator, whether you're going 'to be wid us or again' us.' "

"Another complication," thought Nick, noticing now, with some surprise, that while one of the Japs was watching him the other one devoted all his attention to the stranger; and he added aloud: "I don't believe I know exactly how to answer you just at the present moment, but——"

"But the point is," interrupted the man beside him, "that I want to know, and my friends want to know, and that we have some right to know, if you're going to help us out in this affair or not. We need you and we need you badly; but all that has been gone over carefully before. Has Mustushimi been to see you to-day?"

"Yes."

"Did he invite you to dinner at this hotel three nights hence?"

"Yes."

"Did you accept?"

"I did."

"Are you going to live up to that acceptance and to be present at the dinner?"

"I am."

The stranger started from his chair and thrust out his hand.

"That's all right, senator," he exclaimed, "that's all I wanted to know; good day."

The detective let him go without a word, for his eyes were upon the two Japs who seemed so strangely interested in his movements, and had noticed again that while one of them watched the stranger all the time, the other had never taken his eyes from his own face.

And then, as the detective left his chair and started to his feet, he exclaimed, without, however, speaking aloud or even permitting his lips to move—that is, he exclaimed in thought as people sometimes will do:

"By Jove! I believe I have struck the secret of the mystery at last!"

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S BIT OF STRATEGY.

As Nick crossed the floor of the hotel toward the entrance, he was surprised and somewhat amused to see the senator himself in the character to which he had changed him, hustle in through the doorway with all the breezy atmosphere of the West about him, evidently thoroughly enjoying the character he had assumed and the opportunity that it gave him of observing, without himself being observed. He spied Nick at once and stopped as if he had been shot, momentarily forgetful of the fellow that looked like him, but he came on at once, and with both hands extended, exclaimed so that everybody near them could hear:

"Hello, senator, how are you? Jerusalem, but I'm glad to see you! I've sure looked through the city from one end plumb to the other for you to-day, but I couldn't strike your trail anywhere. How are you, senator, how are you?"

He certainly did the part well, and Nick did not try to repress the smile in which he indulged himself at that moment.

He shook hands heartily with the supposed senator from the West, and together they adjourned once more to the corner that Nick had previously occupied, where they could be as isolated as nearly as it was possible in a place of such a public character. Then he did an odd thing which made the senator stare. He turned the chairs around so that they faced the windows instead of the room when they were seated upon them, thus rendering it impossible for any other person who might be in that room to observe them closely while they were talking.

"Turing your back on all humanity?" asked the senator in a low tone. "Not getting afraid, are you, Carter, that some one will penetrate your disguise?"

"No," said Nick, laughing, "I thought it would be pleasanter facing the windows, that's all."

"But it cuts off our view of the house, and I want to see who comes in."

"Just for the present," said Nick, "I should prefer that we remain unobserved, at least so far as our facial expressions are concerned, and it is not necessary that either of us should see who enters the hotel, at least until I have finished with what I have to say to you."

"Eh? What's that? Got something on your mind already, Carter?"

"Yes, senator; I have several things on my mind."

"Been up against some kind of a proposition already?"

"Two or three of them."

"I hope there's nobody tumbled to you, Carter."

"No, there hasn't been a sign of that; the disguise is too perfect."

"Then, what is the matter?"

Before Nick Carter answered, he turned his head and looked around the vast room that was now behind them, and observed that the two Japanese gentlemen who had so curiously watched him heretofore were in the act of passing through the door toward the avenue; and a moment later he saw them stop and stand side by side on the pavement outside the window where they could look through it, and observe Nick and the senator while they talked together.

"Senator," said Nick, "I have changed my mind about not wanting you to observe the interior of the room while we talk; would you mind turning your chair about so that you face me?"

"What the devil is the matter with you anyway, Carter?"

"Just turn your chair about, senator, and I'll tell you that presently, but don't be surprised at any request I may make about having you move your chair."

"I say, Carter, this becoming statesman so soon hasn't turned your head, has it?"

"No, but just for the moment I'd like to have you turn yourself about."

The senator shifted his chair and adjusted it to suit the detective, and then he saw the latter smile and follow with his eyes some person who was moving outside the house on the pavement.

"What are you looking at now, Carter?" demanded the senator.

"I am watching a man who has attracted my attention, that's all. I'll talk to you presently, senator. We'll get down to 'cases' as you call it; at present I want to do a little maneuvering."

"It strikes me you are doing it all right. Have you got ready for me to make another move with this chair?"

"No, but I shall ask you to do so presently."

One of the Japs left the other outside the hotel, where Nick Carter was facing him, while he himself returned to it, and presently resumed the position he had occupied when the stranger had been talking with the detective, so now they were placed in positions where one of them could watch every move made by the detective, or, rather, every facial expression that he indulged in, while the other could examine as closely the senator himself, who seemed to be a stranger from the West, but who, nevertheless, had suddenly attained importance in their eyes, because of the mere fact that he was conversing with the man whom they supposed to be the real senator.

These maneuvers, which the reader may not yet fully comprehend, were proof positive to the detective that he had hit upon the correct idea, and he was surprised that it had not occurred to him before; even at the time when he had held the interview with the President.

"Well," said the senator, "when are you going to tell me about——" Nick raised his hand and stopped him, and then, as if he were stroking an imaginary mustache, he managed to cover his own lips from the observation of the men outside the building while he said:

"So long as we sit here, senator, let us talk about the weather, or crops, or cattle, or mines, or any subject you choose that is not personal to either of us, or to anything that has happened to-day."

"Oh, I'm agreeable, if that is your wish, Carter."

"Please be careful while you sit here not to mention again my name or anything that has occurred between us. Talk about the weather, or something of that kind; I'll explain to you later."

"Well," said the senator, "the crops have been pretty good out in our part of the country; things are going on very smoothly out there; everything seems to be all right. I hope to gracious that pleases you."

"Perfectly," laughed Nick.

The senator made two or three ludicrous efforts to speak after that, but brought himself up with a sudden stop each time, and presently he leaned forward and whispered in the detective's ear:

"There is absolutely nothing that I can say or that I can think of to say that doesn't touch upon matters that you don't want me to speak about. The little things that you have done since I came through that doorway a moment ago have changed me into an animated interrogation-point, and, unless you find a way to relieve my curiosity somehow, I'll blurt the whole thing out presently."

"I'll ask you a question or two, senator," said Nick, still with his lips concealed by his hand; "and to each of them I would like you to reply by yes or no; don't offer any explanations, and don't say anything further than that."

"All right," was the reply; "go on."

"Do you happen to see, standing somewhere facing you, part way across the room, a Japanese?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes."

"Often?"

"No and yes both."

"Oh, well, you can be a little more explicit than that. Have you seen him very often?"

"Several times, probably."

"Where?"

"How the devil am I going to answer that question?"

"I forgot," laughed Nick. "Now, if you will take this cigar that I offer you, and go across to the cigar-stand and light it, I will in the meantime have changed with

you, and you can take the one I now occupy when you come back."

The senator, who felt himself thoroughly silenced by Nick Carter's emphatic request, could only gaze at the detective for a moment in speechless amazement, for he had no understanding whatever of his conduct, or what it might signify; but he accepted the cigar and crossed to the lighter as he had been requested to do, presently returning and seating himself in the chair formerly occupied by the detective, for the latter had made the exchange while he was absent.

Again Nick Carter, by leaning his elbow on the arm of the chair and resting his chin in his hand, succeeded in covering his lips with his fingers without it being apparent that he was making an effort to do so, and now he asked the senator:

"Look through the window and see if you see another Jap out there."

"I sure do," replied the senator, adopting in his interest the vernacular of his own State.

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes."

"Often?"

"Frequently."

"Approximately, about the same number of times you have seen the other one?"

"Yes."

"Haven't you noticed of late, senator, that you have been meeting Japs all over the city, no matter where you happened to go?"

"I certainly have."

"Sort of made up your mind that the city was filling up with 'em, didn't you, senator?"

"Yes; I had had that idea."

"Now, will you sit here a moment and wait while I go to the desk?"

"Yes."

Nick crossed the floor and spoke to one of the clerks, to whom he said:

"I want a room where I can take a friend of mine and talk with him privately fifteen or twenty minutes, if you have got such a one at your disposal."

"Certainly, senator," was the quick reply, and the clerk called to a boy, whom he directed to take the senator and his friend to a certain room. And Nick, motioning to the senator himself to follow, went with the boy to the elevator, so that presently our two disguised friends had locked themselves in one of the small rooms on the fourth floor of the building. Then to be assured of even greater security, and to the still greater surprise of the senator, Nick drew the lace draperies across the windows, so that there would be no possibility of being observed from the outside; then he turned to the senator, and in a low tone said:

"I think now, my friend, if we talk in a very low tone that we may be sure that what we say will not be reported, and the first question I want to ask you, senator, is this:

"Who and what is Mustushimi?"

The senator's jaw dropped, and he stared for a moment at the detective in amazement; then he chuckled audibly, and finally he said:

"By jingo, Carter! I forgot all about him entirely when I let you take my place in this amazing business of yours."

CHAPTER VII.

A CONFERENCE WITH THE SENATOR.

"Who is Mustushimi?" repeated the detective, with some suggestion of sternness in the question.

"He is a Japanese gentleman of some considerable prominence in his own country, I believe," replied the senator.

"What is he—a politician?"

"I guess they're all politicians over there, aren't they?" replied the senator.

"You have no personal acquaintance with Mustushimi, have you, senator?"

"No; I never saw the fellow."

"But you have heard considerable about him?"

"Sure I have, but what in blazes are you getting at, Carter? What has Mustushimi got to do with this business, and what have those two Japs down-stairs got to do with it, and why did you make me answer 'yes' and 'no,' and compel me to talk about the weather and the crops, and all that sort of rot? What the devil is the matter with you, anyhow? I have bottled up about a thousand questions in the last half-hour that I've wanted to ask you, only you shut me up as if you'd put a gag in my mouth."

"I'll tell you what the matter is, senator," replied the detective, "in order to ease your mind, to satisfy your curiosity, and to convince you that when I make a request of that kind I have a strong reason for doing so."

"Well?"

"For some reason you, and whoever you happen to talk to on the streets or elsewhere, are very closely watched. The spies who watch you happen at the present time to be Japanese. Those spies—I have seen four different ones to-day—are experienced in what is known in deaf and dumb asylums as the 'lip movement,' and they can understand what you are saying when they are a hundred feet away from you, or two or three hundred feet, for that matter, if they are placed so that they can observe the motion of your lips—they can understand you under such circumstances just as well as if you were within three feet of them."

"Je—rusalem!" exclaimed the senator. "Who but Nick Carter would have thought of such a thing as that?"

"It isn't the first time," said Nick, "that I've run into the lip-movement; the only wonder is that I didn't think of it sooner."

"And do you mean to say, Carter, that that was what those fellows were doing down-stairs?"

"Exactly."

"One of them was watching you and the other one watching me?"

"Yes; believing me to be the senator, and you a stranger who had business with me."

"I see; I understand," said the senator.

"They travel in pairs," continued the detective, "in order that nothing shall escape them, and that they may obtain both sides of a conversation, even when the persons conversing are facing in opposite directions."

"But it seems almost incredible that men can acquire the art of reading lip-movement so perfectly as that, unless, at least, they are compelled to do so by being born deaf and dumb."

"I have myself acquired it," said Nick, "and I have found it many times very advantageous in the practise of my profession. My father compelled me to learn it when I was a lad; and to do so perfectly, he compelled me to attend a school for the deaf and dumb, where for six months I had to pretend that I could neither speak nor hear."

"Jingo!" exclaimed the senator. "I should have thought that would not be easy to do."

"It wasn't. It was the hardest thing I ever did in my life, and the most difficult."

"And do you mean to tell me," exclaimed the senator, "that that is the secret behind this eavesdropping business that has puzzled me so?"

"I am sure that it is part of the secret—that it is an explanation of part of the mystery."

"But it couldn't explain all of it, could it?"

"I don't know yet, but I hardly think so."

The detective was thinking at the moment of the conversation he had had with the President.

"Now, senator," he said, after a moment's pause, "I wish you would answer that other question."

"What other question?"

"Tell me something about this Mustushimi; and I ask the question not because I wish to pry into your personal affairs, but because enough has happened to me since I have been playing the part of the senator from the West to convince me that this personage enters prominently into this business somewhere. Who is Mustushimi?"

"Why, Carter, I have told you practically all that I know about him already."

"He called upon you to-day at the Capitol," said Nick.

"Who? Mustushimi himself?"

"Yes."

"What did he want?"

"He came to invite me to a dinner which is to be held in this hotel three nights hence, at which you are expected to meet——"

"Carter!" exclaimed the senator, interrupting him impetuously, "I believe you are the very devil himself in some ways! I have been expecting a call from that man either at my apartment or at the Senate chamber for weeks, and he has never shown up, and now this very day, when you assume my personality and go there in my place, he does so."

"When I left the Capitol," continued the detective, with a peculiar smile on his face and regarding the senator earnestly, "two Japs followed me. When I had come as far up the avenue as the Raleigh Hotel, a man whom I do not know stopped me on the street and asked me if Mustushimi had been to see me, and if I had received the invitation to dinner I have already explained, and had accepted it. While I talked with him, the Japs watched us, and of course understood everything that was said between us.

"When I left that man and came on to the Willard, I seated myself over in that corner where you and I remained for a time, and presently discovered that two other Japs were watching me.

"While I sat there, another stranger approached me, and seemed anxious to know whether you had decided in favor of the people he represents or against them, concerning some matters which he did not explain and which I did not ask about; and again the Japs observed closely, and will presently report somewhere or other everything that passed between us.

"I have explained all this so that you will understand why I want you to tell me all about Mustushimi; and if you want me to continue this case for you, as I have no doubt you want me to do, you must take me into your confidence."

The senator hesitated, plainly annoyed, but at last he said:

"I hope you don't think I'm mixed up in any crooked business, Carter?"

"I haven't permitted myself to form any opinion about it at all, senator. I am entirely negative and neutral so far, but it will be very much better for all concerned if you will convince yourself of the wisdom of confiding in me."

"But there is nothing to confide."

"There is evidently something doing," said the detective, "in which these Japanese appear very deeply interested."

"I think that myself, Carter, but on my word of honor I don't know anything more about it than you do. All that I can tell you is this: About a month or six weeks ago, I think it was, I was approached by a man, an Ameri-

can, who claimed that he had large interests in Korea and Japan, and who wanted me to interest myself in his affairs. I listened to him, of course, but without knowing much more about what he was talking about when he finished than when he began.

"My own opinion has been—and I think that dinner you refer to will clinch it—that there is some kind of chicanery afoot, and that those fellows are merely sounding me to discover if I am vulnerable, and am one of the sort who would be inclined to betray my country or my constituents for a bribe; and I'll confess to you, Carter, that I have purposely appeared to be a sort of easy mark for them in order to discover just what they are at."

"Do you mean that, senator?" asked the detective sharply.

"I certainly do mean it."

"You mean you want to know exactly what they are up to, and exactly how far they will go with you, do you?"

"I do."

"And that no matter what it is they offer you, financially or otherwise, you would not be impressed or moved by them out of the regular channel of your daily life?"

"Carter," said the senator, "there is one thing about me that is true, no matter what other faults I may have. I am an honest man."

"I believe you," said Nick; "and because I do believe you I have an important suggestion to make here and now."

"What is it?"

"It is that you will let me continue to impersonate you until after that dinner is given."

"But how are you going to do it? You cannot sit in the Senate; you don't know the *modus operandi* up there; you don't know anything about my committee work, and it would seem to me to be impossible."

"I sent word by a page to your committee-room today," interrupted Nick, "to the effect that I did not feel well enough—they believing me to be the senator—to go to the committee-room, and that I was leaving the Capitol at once. I can keep that up, if necessary. At all events, I can promise you that I won't make any 'bulls.'"

"All right," said the senator, "I'm willing if you think you can carry it through. There is nothing of any particular importance so far as I am concerned that is on hand now, but I do envy you that dinner."

"But I don't doubt you can buy a better one in the regular restaurant," said Nick.

"Oh, it isn't the dinner itself that I envy you; it is the fun you will have with the men who attend it."

"Don't you know what that dinner is for, senator?"

"No, I don't, Carter. I haven't any more idea about it than you have, although I have been expecting the invitation for a considerable time; all that I do know is that the time for it has been deferred again and again, until those who proposed it could feel sure that I was in the right state of mind to be told what they have on their minds. It is because I would like to be present and hear that that I envy you."

"I'll tell you what they have on their minds now," said Nick. "The Japanese are a nation of plotters, and I've seen enough to-day to feel convinced that this is a Japanese affair. There is some devilry afoot which may appear to be only business and commercial affairs just now, but which is likely to become transformed into matters of national importance at almost any moment. I have more reasons than you know, senator, for believing this, and aside from the case you have given me, and the interest I feel in it, I have another and an important reason when I tell you that I mean to ferret out this mystery to the end."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL OF A MYSTERY.

In order to be perfectly in accord with the character he had assumed, it was necessary that Nick Carter should occupy during the time he was playing the part the rooms of the senator, which was presently agreed upon between them, the latter taking up temporary quarters at the Hotel Willard in his assumed character as a new arrival from the West.

It would be difficult for any one to realize the genuine fun that the senator was getting out of this masquerading. Having satisfied himself that he could go anywhere he pleased without the fear of recognition, he employed every spare moment of his time in thrusting himself into company where he could listen without being observed, and he had rather the questionable enjoyment two or three different times of hearing himself discussed rather plainly. All of this, however, was nothing to the detective, and did not concern him so long as he was satisfied that the senator was sufficiently interested in what he was doing to refrain from interfering in the detective's occupation; that was all Nick desired.

The rooms that the senator occupied were located in an apartment-house in the northwestern section of the city, and to them the detective repaired as soon as he left the Willard Hotel. He was mindful of the fact that, in order to keep the engagement he had made with the President for nine o'clock that evening, it would be necessary for him to resume, for the time being, his proper personality, and this he hesitated to do for obvious reasons, for aside from the fact that it would be somewhat difficult for him to make up the disguise again as perfectly as he had accomplished it in the first place, was the exceeding likelihood that one or more of the men who were evidently plotting against the senator might call upon him at any time at the rooms to continue their schemes.

And this plot against the senator, if it may be dignified

by that name, was a puzzling circumstance to the detective; an altogether mysterious affair.

It was a plot against the statesman only in the abstract, that was evident; a scheme whereby the senator was to be induced, if possible, by bribery or otherwise, to debauch his position and misuse his powers and abilities for the furtherance of some stupendous measure which was plainly in hand against the government itself, or if not against the government, then for the advantage of another power that would be directly in opposition to the interests of the United States. This view of the case was plainly evident to Nick Carter because of the interest the same spies had taken in the movements and conversations of the President himself.

And so, as Nick thought the matter over, he presently determined in his own mind that it would be far better for the interests of all concerned if he should neglect the appointment he had made with the President and seek no further interview with the Chief Executive; at least, until he had discovered much more in relation to these matters than he was now aware of.

When he arrived at the senator's rooms, as already described, he found himself confronted by a new dilemma in the person of the senator's private secretary, a young man, who came to the door to admit him when he arrived. Plainly this young chap should be gotten rid of at once, and in some manner that would not make him suspect all that was being played, and so, passing into the senator's study, he dictated rapidly a letter to Nick Carter in New York—that is, to himself—knowing that Chick would accept and read it when it arrived there; and that done, he directed the young man to board the evening train and to deliver the letter in person, telling him at the same time that there would be no answer, but that he might amuse himself for a day or two in New York City, if he cared to do so.

He had the satisfaction presently of seeing the young man depart, and of knowing that now he had the senator's apartment to himself; and then recurred to him the question of his appointment with the President. It was now evening, and lacked but a few hours of the time when he should appear at the White House, and he knew the President well enough to be aware that he was a stickler for appointments, and that he would be expected to arrive there promptly at the time set for the interview.

He glanced at the telephone on the desk, and for a moment thought of using that, but, realizing that his conversation would have to be carried on with one of the secretaries to the President, he dismissed the thought at once, for there is never an assurance of secrecy over the telephone-wire, and he could not explain to a third party what he wished to say, and then a happy thought occurred to him.

Why not call there a half-hour, or at least a few moments before nine o'clock, in the character of the senator from the West himself?

He knew that if he did so, there would be a chance that the President would not be inclined to receive him, having no appointment with the senator and being in momentary expectation of the arrival of Nick Carter; and he realized, also, that if he was received, the interview would be a difficult one to carry out on the lines he would wish to follow.

Over and over again the detective asked himself the question—what possible interest could Japanese have in approaching the senator, as unquestionably had been done, and in spying upon the President, the cabinet officers, and other officials who were connected with the government? He could find no possible answer to this question that was satisfactory, for, if the Eastern mind is difficult of analysis by the standards of Western intelligence, Eastern diplomacy as inaugurated by the island empire was infinitely more so.

The question at issue might be merely California and the suggested Exclusion Act; or this might be a much greater affair, and contemplate in its development the ultimate acquirement by Japan of the Philippines or of Hawaii, both of which the world acknowledges Japan looks upon with lustful eyes.

Nick watched the clock around until the hands pointed to eight, still undecided what to do; but when the hammer in the clock chimed out the hour he started to his feet with sudden resolution, put on the senator's hat and seized the senator's cane, and, having helped himself to one of the senator's cigars, started from the house with the intention of walking directly to the executive mansion, and of sending one of the senator's cards to the President.

The apartment of the senator was situated on the ground floor of the building, and when Nick stepped into the corridor, he had only a few paces to walk before passing out upon the approach which communicated directly with the pavement to the street. As he paused there for a moment, looking about him with casual indifference, he was conscious instantly of the fact that the espionage of his movements had not been discontinued, and that there were at least two persons near who were waiting for him to appear. One of these was standing at the curb, almost directly in front of the door, tapping his trousers with a short rattan cane affected by the Japanese; the other was across the street, and in the shadow of a large tree-trunk, that obscured him so thoroughly that Nick could not determine whether or not he was also a Japanese.

The very evident indifference of these spies as to whether they should be spotted or not, as such, was both perplexing and annoying to the detective, who read from it a suggestion that they already had succeeded in spreading their net so thoroughly about the senator that they no longer feared the outcome of their plans.

With a glance first at one of them and then at the other,

and then with a shrug of his shoulders, which expressed the thought that he would dismiss them from his consideration for the time being, the detective stepped out upon the street and strode along it rapidly, being careful to assume as perfectly as possible the gait and the carriage of the man in whose character he was masquerading.

So he passed into Connecticut Avenue and along it to Lafayette Square, crossing the latter so that presently he came out upon Pennsylvania, directly opposite the gate to the White House grounds.

Here he paused long enough to glance around him, to discover if he was still followed by the Japs; but perceiving only one of them, and casting aside the remnant of the cigar he had been smoking, he hastened across the avenue, and presently ascended the steps of the executive mansion.

As the door was opened to admit him to the main corridor of the White House, to which admittance may be obtained at almost any hour, he glanced at his watch, and saw that it was exactly half-past eight, and then to the attendant who stepped forward to ask his business he said:

"I have no appointment with the President, but I wish you would take my card to him, and say that it is a matter of the utmost importance that I should see him for just five minutes. I promise not to detain him longer."

"I have received orders," began the attendant, but Nick interrupted him.

"I have no doubt that the President has given directions that he was not to be disturbed, but if you will take my message and card to him exactly as I have told you to do, I think he will be glad to receive me."

Five minutes later he was conducted up the stairs and through the anteroom of the private secretary's office, to find presently that the man upon whom the eyes of the world are fixed at the present moment was standing in the doorway of the same room where Nick had been received that morning, waiting for him.

"Good evening, senator," said the President, before Nick could speak; "I think you said just five minutes. I will hold you to your word about that. Come in;" and he stood aside while Nick passed into the room, whereupon he closed the door himself, and, seating himself on one corner of the desk in the most democratic fashion imaginable, said in his usual concise and final manner:

"Well, senator, what is it?"

"Are we entirely alone, Mr. President?" asked Nick, now rather amused by the circumstances by which they were surrounded, and the President replied:

"It would seem so, although I have almost ceased lately to believe that I can ever rely upon that condition. What is it that you want with me?"

Nick looked at the pictures on the walls; he glanced toward the windows and inspected the draperies over them with his keen eyes; he sought in every corner of the room for the presence of a possible secret intruder, assuring himself at the same time of the utter folly of the thought that such a condition could exist there in the private room of the President; but, nevertheless, he covered his lips with his fingers as he replied in a low tone, still maintaining the air and the manner and the voice of the senator from the West:

"I have brought you a message, Mr. President, to the effect that the appointment that you made for nine o'clock this evening with another person cannot be fulfilled by him."

The President's jaws closed with a snap, and then opened again for him to inquire sharply:

"May I ask, senator, how it happens that you are so well informed concerning the appointments I may have made?"

It was then that Nick Carter raised his eyes to the President's, and replied in his own natural tones:

"I beg, Mr. President, you will not show any surprise at what I am about to say. I am not the senator, and, as you have no doubt guessed, now that my voice is natural, I am Nick Carter himself."

The President smiled, but not a single expression of surprise came into his face as he replied:

"It is well done. I have known clever things done in New York, while I served as a police commissioner, but you have certainly deceived me entirely for the moment; but I see through the masquerade now prefectly well. Will you inform me why you have ventured upon this extraordinary act, and tell me just what the senator whom you appear to be has to do with it?"

"That, Mr. President, if you will permit me, I do not wish to take the time to do now. I told the attendant at the door I would not detain you five minutes, and I would like to have him think that you dismissed me at the end of that five minutes, but I assure you that the senator knows nothing of our interview, and is not aware of the fact that I am here at your request. I can also say that since leaving you to-day I think I have got upon the trail of this mystery. If you are content to leave the rest of it to me, and will let me work it out in my own way, I believe it can be accomplished in a very short time."

"All right," said the President, "your five minutes is up, senator. Work the matter out to your own satisfaction and in your own way. Report to me when you will. I would not have sent for you had I not been convinced before I did so that the matter might be satisfactorily left in your hands."

With a bow and a short good night, Nick passed out of the room and down the stairs, nodding to the attendant who had admitted him as he passed, and on along the pathway to Pennsylvania Avenue, where, as he approached the gate, he discovered two men awaiting him, while at the curb, just beyond them, was a closed carriage, with a driver seated upon its box and with still

another man standing near it, with his hand upon the latch of the door.

As he passed out of the gate one of the men accosted him, and said:

"Good evening, senator. Baron Mustushimi is inside the carriage awaiting you. If you will enter it he will drive you to your home. He wishes very much to talk with you."

"All right," replied the detective, for although he scented in this affair of the waiting carriage a possible plot of kidnaping, he decided on the instant to risk it and see the game through to the end.

And so he stepped forward across the pavement and passed in at the now open door of the carriage which was instantly slammed shut behind him.

CHAPTER IX.

A JAPANESE THREAT.

It was not until the door had slammed shut behind the detective that he realized how easily he had walked into a carefully prepared trap. He discovered on the instant that he was alone inside the hack, and at once turned to the door again to open it, but only to discover that each of the doors were innocent of any sort of handle on the inside of them and were as effectually locked against him as if they had been bolted and barred from the outside.

And then, too, he had no sooner begun his seach for a means of opening the doors than the lights from the streets were shut out by iron shutters gliding into place where the glass windows should have been, and Nick Carter knew that for the time at least he was a prisoner in the hack.

But although a prisoner, he had not been otherwise molested nor had a word been spoken save those that were quoted here; he was therefore in possession of his weapons, and regarded himself as entirely competent to protect himself when the occasion should arise to do so.

On the whole he rather relished this sudden turn of affairs.

It always pleased him when the parties to whom he was opposed assumed the iniative, for it was one of his principles of action to compel others to assert themselves whenever it was possible to do so.

Nor did he apprehend that any serious danger menaced the senator from the West, for whom there was no doubt that these men who had captured him, mistook him.

It was apparent to Nick that they only undertook to get the statesman in their power for a time in order that they might determine without further delay just how useful he might be to them in their plans.

He was no sooner inside the vehicle than the horses started away at a rapid trot, and Nick gave himself up to a careful calculation of the course they pursued in order that he might be able to determine, when their destination was reached, approximately where he might be.

The carriage had been headed down the avenue, and now it turned into 15th Street and around the corner past the treasury building, thence down the avenue again to 14th Street, where it turned south and presently drove out upon the long bridge which crossed the Potomac to the Virgina shore at that point.

They drove rapidly, and after they entered the State of Virginia turned toward the southwest, and for an hour the horses were driven at a furious pace along the highway until presently the detective knew that they were turning in through the gates of some private estate, and a few minutes later, by the crunch of the gravel under the wheels, he guessed that they were passing along a regular driveway, past the side of some sort of building.

A moment later he heard the rumble of wheels upon a plank flooring, and knew by the noises that surrounded him and by the stoppage of the carriage and the stamp of the men's feet upon the floor as they leaped to it, from the box, that they had driven into a stable or barn and that their destination, for the present at least, had been reached.

He waited then in expectation for the lowering of the steel blinds that were over the windows of the hack and the appearance of the faces of one or more of his captors at the aperture.

He could hear the noises of the unharnessing of the horses; he heard murmuring voices in conversation, although he could distinguish no word that was uttered, and then the rumbling sliding of a huge door into place and the dropping of a bar to fasten it, told him that he had been left alone and was destined, at least for a time, to remain so.

He touched the button of his pocket electric torch presently and looked at the time, discovering that it was a few moments past eleven, and realizing that he had been more than two hours making the journey in the hack, and then fastening the catch of the button so that the light would continue, he gave his attention to a careful inspection of the interior of the conveyance.

He saw almost at once that it was merely an ordinary hack that had been arranged rather skilfully for this particular purpose; and he had no doubt that he would be able with very little difficulty to make his escape from it, for as the reader knows, Nick Carter never traveled without his little pocket case of tools, which many times he had found extremely useful in his career; but he did not believe that it was the intention of his captors to leave him long inside that extraordinary prison; for it was not a logical outcome of the situation that the Japs or their employers should abduct a senator

of the United States with any intention of forcibly detaining him, and Nick did not for a moment believe that they had guessed he was not the senator.

It was perhaps half an hour after he had heard the sliding of the door after his captors closed it when it was opened again and footsteps approached the carriage. Then the steel blinds at the side of it were lowered one at a time, and the face of Mustushimi appeared at one of them, holding a lantern lifted so that he could look inside the hack at the detective, whom he supposed to be the senator from the West.

"I have to make my apologies to you, sir," he said with a bland smile, "for this rather unceremonious proceeding in bringing you to my house, and I wish to assure you that it was a mistake and entirely against my wishes that you were driven into this stable and left here alone until I could be notified that you had arrived."

He opened the door while he was speaking and stepped back, indicating by a gesture that Nick was free to descend, but as the detective did so he saw that standing around the carriage and within easy reach of Mustushimi were half a dozen Japs who were palpably there for the purpose of using force, if force should be necessary, to persuade the supposed senator to accept without question the conditions by which he was surrounded.

Nick looked calmly into the face of Mustushimi, and then glanced from one to another of the others who were grouped around him, and replied:

"I have a right, baron, to be extremely angry at this proceeding, but I don't know what good it would do to quarrel. If you had had your men inform me before I entered the carriage that you desired me to come here, the precautions you adopted to bring me would have been entirely unnecessary. Now, sir, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why you have dared to do this thing to a senator of the United States."

Mustushimi smiled and bowed.

"It shall be explained, senator, to your entire satisfaction," he said softly, and showing his teeth in another smile. "I promise you, sir, that you will pardon me for this apparently high-handed proceeding when you have heard my explanation, but now, will you accompany me to the house?"

"Most certainly," replied Nick.

With another bow, Mustushimi turned abruptly and led the way through the door into the darkness beyond; thence along a gravel pathway toward the looming shadow of one of the old-time country mansions that are peculiar to Virginia.

Nick noticed with a smile, as they proceeded, that the men who were with Mustushimi grouped themselves behind him in such a manner that they were instantly prepared to leap forward and attack him in case he should make any effort to escape, and it was plain to the detective then that the Japs intended to compel the senator to adopt their plans, if such a thing were possible.

He smiled again as he wondered what would have happened if the senator himself had really been there in his place, for with all the statesman's jocularity, Nick knew that nevertheless there was a fiery temper behind it, and he had no doubt there would have been a fight worth seeing on that barn floor the instant he was liberated from the hack, had the prisoner been the senator himself.

Presently they entered the house through the front door, and Nick was conducted into a large room where were a spacious fireplace; and into this room the men who seemed to form the body-guard of Mustushimi followed them.

The baron indicated a chair as they entered the room and said:

"Will you be seated, senator?"

"No," replied Nick. "I prefer to stand, at least until this outrage upon my person has been explained."

The baron shrugged his shoulders and seated himself upon one of the chairs, while he replied calmly:

"You must be wise enough, senator, to know that our affairs have progressed to that point where it has become necessary that we should know exactly your position. It was necessary, senator, that I should see you and make personal terms with you before we meet at that little dinner-party which has been arranged; and because of that necessity I ventured to adopt this means of bringing you here to-night."

"But why not have sent for me openly?" demanded Nick.

"I was not assured that you would consent to come. It was easier to bring you by force before you were warned that it might possibly be used, than to depend upon chance for securing this interview, and you are doubtless aware that my Sublime Master leaves nothing to chance."

"What do you want of me?" demanded Nick.

"I want to know, senator, I want to be assured—in fact I must be certain—that you are willing to uphold our interests in the great issues that we have at stake."

"How am I to answer that until I am informed just what those issues are?"

"You have already been sufficiently informed to guess them, senator."

"I never make guesses on matters of so much importance. You will have to be explicit, Mustushimi, if you wish me to be so."

For a moment the Japanese baron was silent, and then without preface he said bluntly:

"Our reasons for approaching you originally, senator, were that it was known that you were a comparatively poor man, an ambitious man, and a brilliant one, whose desire is to become rich and powerful and prominent

in the minds of the public. We saw in you what you call in your land 'an easy mark,' for our purposes. I hope my words do not offend."

"Oh, no," said Nick, with a shrug, "it would be quite impossible for you to offend me."

"There are movements on foot now, in charge of emissaries of the Japanese Government, which must be carried out successfully and which will be so ultimately. In the position you hold as a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in the support that you could give certain measures that my emperor desires to see furthered in this country, you have become important to us, and you have been brought to me here to-night, senator, to receive two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in your own money as part payment for the services you will render us in the work we have to do; and I am here to assure you that as that work progresses you will receive other payments of like amounts until the large sum of two million dollars have been paid to you."

"All that is very interesting," said Nick, smiling and appearing to show a decided interest in the subject. "I suppose, baron, the money is in cash?"

"Most certainly so. Would you like to see it?"

"Oh, no; your word is quite sufficient. What I wish to know is, what do I give in return for this first payment?"

"Your solemn oath and your written acceptance over your own signature of entire allegiance to our cause."

"Indeed?" said Nick; "don't you think that is asking a great deal of a man who holds the position that I do?"

"We have considered that, senator."

"And will my promised word to you and the letter you have indicated with my signature attached to it, be sufficient?"

"For the present, it will."

"What is the ultimate outcome of this affair? Am I to be made a traitor to my country?"

The Jap shrugged his shoulders and replied bluntly:

"That is as you view it."

"What is the ultimate outcome of your plans?" repeated Nick.

"In a word, senator, the acquisition by Japan of the Philippine Islands. You are known to have opposed from the beginning the retention of them by the United States, and you are known to be one of the leading spirits in the movement that has been steadily going on ever since you possessed them, for giving the Filipinos entire independence."

Nick nodded and appeared for a moment to be thinking deeply as if he were greatly impressed by what was said to him, and then he inquired sharply:

"Suppose I should refuse, baron, even to consider this proposition you have made to me; what then?"

The baron left his seat deliberately and stood with his hands behind him directly in front of the detective and said with more directness than he had used before:

"In that case, senator, there is a grave already dug for you and a steel box that can be hermetically sealed, waiting to receive you here. In that case, senator, although it is already past midnight, you will never be permitted to see the light of another day!"

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER'S DASH FOR FREEDOM.

There was no mistaking the intentions of the Japanese plotters now.

Convinced of his power over the senator; satisfied in his own mind that the statesman was entirely helpless, and doubtless assured in his own mind that he would readily consent to the bribery that had been proposed, the Japanese baron had not hesitated to unmask himself entirely in making this last statement.

"You play with a high hand," said Nick, apparently unmoved by the threats he had heard.

"We have to do that to succeed," was the calm reply.

"Do you mean that you would dare to put me to death if I should refuse?" asked the detective, wondering if the baron would really intend to go so far or if it were merely a Japanese bluff that he was making.

"I mean exactly what I have said, senator," he said. "I have taken this responsibility upon myself. My government would of course repudiate it and me also if I should be forced to go to such extremities, but a Japanese subject, when he receives an order, carries it out to the end, no matter what the consequences may be to him, personally, and now, sir, it is for you to answer me."

"It is a very simple thing, baron," said Nick, "to write a letter and sign it as you have described it; almost as simple as the mere making of a promise such as you have demanded. I might easily repudiate one and break the other as soon as I left you."

"Concerning that," replied the baron, "I take my

chances just as you would take yours if you should venture to do so."

"You mean by that, I suppose, that I would be assassinated?"

"You have guessed it, senator."

Nick left the chair he had been occupying and crossed to the mantel, where he stood leaning upon it idly while he surveyed the group that surrounded him. The baron in the foreground and five Japanese athletes in different parts of the room, each one ready to leap forward at an instant's notice to assist in overpowering him.

The detective rather liked the situation. There was something invigorating in it, and danger—and this was real danger, he knew—always affected him like a tonic.

"I am afraid, baron," he said, "that you have read my character rather poorly if you suppose that threats would influence me. Had you sent word to me to-night that you wished me to come here I should have come and saved you all the trouble you have undertaken; had you approached me differently with the proposition you have made concerning my allegiance to what you describe as your 'cause,' it is possible that I might have been persuaded to listen to you, but, baron, with the previous knowledge that a grave has been dug for me and that a steel box that can be hermetically sealed is awaiting me, I distinctly decline your proposition and emphatically refuse to have anything more to do with you!"

The baron took a step forward at this cool statement by the supposed senator, and each of the others in the room gathered themselves in readiness for an attack upon the detective, but he surveyed them coolly and smilingly as he held up his right hand and continued:

"Wait a moment, if you please, before you make that attack you are considering now. I am no weakling, Baron Mustushimi, and in the hand that I hold in my pocket there is a pistol pointed directly at you; not at your heart, baron, for I strongly suspect that underneath your waistcoat there is a steel shirt that is intended to stop bullets; but at your brain, and, baron, I am a dead shot with either hand!"

The situation had its dramatic possibilities. The baron was visibly affected by the coolness of the man he had thought so easily to terrorize, and the assurance that he had received that the bullet would be fired at his head and not at his heart, which, of a truth, was protected as Nick had guessed, was rather appalling.

Nevertheless he said, and the bland smile remained on his face:

"You would not be permitted to escape from this house alive; you would not be able to overcome all of us before you were captured."

"No, baron, that is quite true, but you are forgetting one important point."

"Indeed? May I ask what that is?"

"You are forgetting that Baron Mustushimi would be the first dead man; not an interesting nor an entertaining thought, baron."

If it is possible for a shade of pallor to sweep across the face of a Japanese, which is frequently denied, one did so now in the case of the baron, and he sought to accomplish by argument the object that he previously thought he could obtain by threats.

"It would do you no good to make use of that weapon, senator," he said affably, and at the same time moving his right hand slowly toward the pocket of his own coat, but Nick interrupted him sharply by exclaiming:

"If you put that hand in your pocket, baron, I will kill you! Stand where you are and do not move, for although there are six of you and I am only one, I hold the winning trump in the little game we are playing just now!"

The bland smile of the baron had become rather sickly by this time.

The entire self-confidence he had assumed at the beginning had totally deserted him, for it is never a pleasant thought to the leader of any expedition or plan to know that he will be the first victim of it if it develops.

"Suppose I withdraw the threat, senator?" he asked; "will you discuss the subject with me further?"

"Perhaps," replied Nick laconically.

"In that case, won't you take a chair?"

"No, thank you, I will remain exactly where I am, and you will oblige me by doing the same, baron."

"How, then, is there anything left for us to discuss?"

"There is much, my dear baron, which we might discuss if we were alone together, but with five witnesses on your side and none on my own, there is no discussion possible."

"What would you have me do?"

"First, instruct your men to leave this room, and remain in it yourself alone with me. We shall then be on equal terms, and I will talk the matter over with you to whatever lengths you please."

The baron hesitated, and while he did so, Nick, with a quick motion, withdrew his left hand from the pocket

of his coat, thus revealing the presence of the pistol he had referred to, and he said smilingly:

"In order that you may be convinced that I have spoken the truth, baron."

The Jap half-started back with a little cry of fright, but he recovered himself instantly, and with remarkable self-possession for one in his predicament, turned his back squarely upon Nick while he spoke rapidly in the Japanese language to the other men who were in the room.

Had Nick been indeed the senator this might have been a perfectly safe method for the baron to pursue, but being Nick Carter himself and understanding the Japanese language perfectly, as the reader of the NICK CARTER histories knows, everything he said was perfectly plain to the detective.

What he did say, was this:

"You will leave the room, all of you. Three of you will remain directly outside the door ready to enter again at my call. The others will summon all the men that are here and guard the other door and the windows of this room so long as I remain in it; and, Fujimi, you will go to the room directly over us and keep this man covered with your revolver. At the slightest indication on his part that he intends to attack me, you will shoot him dead. Go!"

Nick was smiling broadly as the men left the room, and he waited only until the last one had passed out and closed the door behind him when, with a sudden and totally unexpected energy, he leaped forward quickly, and before the baron had the slightest warning of what was happening, seized him by the throat and forced him back upon a chair in a far corner of the room.

"Now, baron," he said, "the tables are turned for a moment," and then still holding the man by the throat he struck him a sharp blow with his fist over the temple, instantly reducing him to a state of total unconsciousness, for although the baron might have been no mean antagonist had he been given an opportunity to make use of his science of ju-jutsu, he was like a child in the grasp of the detective, who had seized him before he had an opportunity to defend himself.

And Nick Carter knew that the time would be very short ere that second door to which the baron had referred would also be guarded, otherwise he would not have struck that blow which, under different circumstances, might have been deemed almost a cowardly one.

As it was, no sooner had the baron collapsed in his grasp than the detective lifted him from his feet and threw him across his shoulder as if he were a bag of meal, sprang to the door, opened it, passed through and closed it again, leaving himself with his burden in utter darkness and in surroundings entirely unknown to him, just as he heard the sound of approaching footsteps coming in that direction. It was the work of an instant to flash his electric torch and discover that he was in a room not unlike the first, although smaller, which contained three doors—the one through which he had entered, another which apparently opened upon the hall and toward which the footsteps were approaching, and still another directly opposite him at the other side of the room.

At once the detective dashed across the space to this last of the three doors, and passed through it with the burden he carried, just at the moment when he heard the men who had been sent there arrive.

Another flash of his light revealed that he was in a narrow entry and near a door which evidently gave upon the grounds outside the house.

It was locked and barred, and the detective was obliged to put the unconscious form of the baron upon the floor while he removed the impediments to his further progress.

But he worked rapidly, and in less time than it takes to tell it had passed outside with the baron still in his grasp, and having closed the door behind him, he sped away along the sod beside the pathway toward the stables in which he had first been a prisoner.

The detective calculated that he should have at least five or six minutes in which to carry out the plan he had hastily outlined, which was to secure one of the horses and to escape from the vicinity of that house on its back, and to take the baron with him; for Nick Carter knew that in the baron reposed a full explanation of the mysteries he was trying to solve.

The distance to the stable was probably three hundred feet, and Nick's pathway lay entirely in the shadow, so that he reached it without his flight across the intervening space having been discovered. He knew that it would not be long before the utter silence in the room from which he had taken the baron would induce the men who were on guard outside the door to enter it, and that then the pursuit would instantly begin; and now that he had the baron in his power, Nick had no wish to be interrupted in his flight if it were possible to escape without it.

By flashing his electric torch in the stable he speedily discovered the stalls that the horses occupied, and it was a matter of a moment's time only to lead one of them out by the halter; and having previously laid the baron across its back, to leap upon the animal and dash away through the grounds toward the road to Washington.

There was no time, as the reader must realize, to saddle or bridle the horse, and indeed neither were necessary, and so it happened that Nick Carter with Baron Mustishimi held firmly in his grasp dashed past the house and down the roadway toward the highway just as a series of shouts came from doors and windows of the old mansion, and he knew that his escape and flight had been discovered.

And then, as the horse passed under the shadow of the tree beside the roadway, half a dozen spiteful rifle-shots crashed through the darkness behind him, although the bullets flew harmlessly over his head.

CHAPTER XI.

MUSTUSHIMI FINDS HIS MASTER.

Nick Carter never regretted anything more in his life than he did the fact that Baron Mustishimi was a very small man, scarcely larger than one's idea of a boy of fourteen, for if he had only been big enough, what a delight it would have been for the detective to have adopted the same course in relation to him that he had with the senator, and to have made himself up to represent the baron and so return to the country-seat in Virginia to deceive his followers.

But such a course was out of the question, for while a man may add to his height and to his physique in order to masquerade as another, it is another thing when it comes to diminishing either of them.

Nick, who had considered carefully the direction taken by the carriage in which he had been a prisoner, experienced no difficulty in finding his way back to the city; and the horse he rode proved not only to be a good one but one which some time previously had had a Western training, so that he was guided perfectly by a pressure of the knees on the part of his rider.

Moreover, the horse that Nick had selected proved to be a fresh one—that is, not one of those that had been attached to the carriage—and considering the fact that time had not permitted the detective any choice, this was a fortunate circumstance.

It was not long after his escape from the house when the detective heard the beat of hoofs on the road behind him, and knew that he was pursued, but he did not anticipate that the chase would continue very far, nor did he believe that the pursuing party could overtake him, since the horse he was riding was such a good beast and so entirely fresh.

There is a gambling-house near the Virginia end of the long bridge, which has been there for many years, at times closed and deserted, and at others glaringly open and in full operation.

Nick realized that to ride into the city of Washington, hatless as he was, and with the burden he carried, and upon a horse which had neither saddle nor bridle, would attract altogether too much attention even at that hour of the night, and so when he approached the gambling-house referred to, he dismounted, and having bound and gagged the baron, who was now rapidly recovering consciousness, deposited him in some bushes at the side of the road and then went on toward "The Lair of the Tiger," where he knew his way about because he had been there more than once in his professional capacity.

Having tied his horse outside and entered and called the proprietor to him, he made known his wants and was quickly provided with one of the hacks that were waiting there to carry the patrons of the gambling-house across the bridge when they should have won or lost enough to satisfy them.

And so, having turned loose the horse he had ridden, and sent him scurrying back along the road to his stable, the detective entered the hack the proprietor had provided for him and was driven rapidly to the home of the senator from the West.

It was a quarter past two o'clock when Nick deposited Baron Mustushimi on the wide couch in the senator's library and removed the gag from his mouth while he looked smilingly down into the glaring eyes of his prisoner, who was still bound hand and foot, and therefore utterly helpless so far as any possibility of escape was concerned.

"Well, baron," said the detective, "how do you feel now? As sassy as you did over there in that house of your own?"

The baron made no reply.

"You didn't know what you were up against when you tackled the senator from the West, did you, baron? We are rather used to fighting Indians out there, and little chaps like you don't cut very much ice with us."

The baron only glared; his rage was too deep for utterance.

"Now, baron," said the detective, still maintaining in every particular his character as the senator, "it is not too late for us to come to an understanding and to enter upon some sort of an agreement, but it is a thing that I never do and never would do under coercion. I have been wondering, baron, if you happen to have that two hundred and fifty thousand dollars you mentioned, in your clothes."

The baron grinned this time, but still he did not reply.

"So," said Nick, understanding him, "you were too wise for that, weren't you? It's just as well, baron, for I do not require it at the present moment, and I have no doubt that when I agree to your terms you will produce it."

"I will, senator," said the baron hopefully, at last finding his tongue.

"Baron," pursued the detective, "do you realize what you have asked me, as a senator of the United States, to do?"

"Possibly I do not realize it from your standpoint," replied the baron, now hopefully confident that the senator was at last about to accept his terms.

"You have asked me to become a traitor to my country for pay," said the detective.

The baron shrugged his shoulder.

"I have said just now, baron, that I am quite willing to listen to you under these changed circumstances, and possibly to make an agreement with you, although I wish you to understand that I don't promise; but I'll promise you this, however, that in case I don't enter upon an agreement you shall be set at liberty at once."

"Then why not begin by doing that now?" asked the baron.

"Because, my dear sir, we have not yet entered upon the agreement. As I understand you, you wish me to betray my country into your hands so far as it may facilitate you in the working out of the schemes of your particular party in Japan to obtain possession of the Philippines, and possibly, thereafter, of the Hawaiian Islands."

"You are correct," admitted the baron, "although I did not think you would view it as a traitorous act, knowing your views as I do."

"We need not discuss that phase of the question," said Nick. "You have told me that you would be willing to pay me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars at once, and a million and three-quarter dollars more in payments of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars each later on, provided I agree to your terms. Is that correct?"

"It is."

"Have you the money to make those payments?"

"I know where I can procure it at very short notice."

"Baron, while I was at that house in the country in Virginia, and while you thought I was entirely in your power, you told me that you would be contented with my agreement, provided I put the same in writing over my signature, and also made you a verbal promise."

"That is correct, senator."

"Now, I wish to ask you, if, inasmuch as the conditions are reversed and you are here in the house of a senator of the United States, and therefore in his power, you are willing to put your part of the agreement in writing over your signature?"

The baron frowned and hesitated, and did not reply.

"I shall require it, baron, if I enter into any agreement with you," said Nick, "and I will discuss an agreement no further with you until you have made and signed such a writing."

"How can I do that with my hands tied?" asked the baron.

"Oh, I'll release your hands long enough for you to write anything you wish," was the calm reply.

"I might ask you, senator, the same question that you demanded of me several hours ago."

"Yes? What is that?"

"Suppose I refuse; what, then?"

"Why, then," said Nick, "I shall convey you from here to the police-station, make a charge of attempted murder against you and your followers, and will see that it is prosecuted to the bitter end. It will result, baron, notwithstanding anything that the diplomacy of your country can do, in your passing several years in a United States prison; furthermore, I shall report to the senate, and to the President of the United States also, exactly what you have proposed to me to-night. You see, baron, I don't threaten your life, I only threaten your liberty and the exposé of your plans. I fancy that under those circumstances a United States prison would be a much safer place for you than your own country."

The baron shuddered, and Nick laughed aloud.

"You see, baron," continued the detective, "I know something about the estimation in which you would be held at home, provided I should expose you as I have threatened to do. You would shrug your shoulders at

me if I should threaten you with death, but you will pale at the threat I do make."

"You are a devil," said the baron.

"Oh, no," laughed Nick, "I am not exactly the man you thought me to be, that's all. Now, how about that writing, baron? Are you ready to make it?"

The baron hesitated, but presently he replied:

"Have I your promise, if I do make the writing you demand, that it will be treated in confidence between us?"

"Baron Mustushimi, understand me. I make you no promises whatever. I merely say that I will consider, and only consider, the making of an agreement with you provided you will first make that in writing and sign it."

"Very well," said the baron, "I will do it."

"Good," replied the detective, and he lifted the Japanese baron to a chair beside the table, placed pen and ink and paper before him, and then untied the bonds which held his hands.

"Now," said Nick, "be good enough to read aloud as you write; it will save time, and it will assure me that you are making a correct statement."

It is not necessary to repeat here the statement that was written out and signed by Baron Mustushimi at that time. It is sufficient that it covered entirely the proposition he had made to the supposed senator, and was an utter and entire betrayal of his most secret plans, for Mustushimi realized that he could be placed in no worse a position than he was already, for now, unless he could induce the senator to enter into the agreement with him, the only course left open to the Japanese was suicide; and so it was that he grasped at this one straw which the detective held out to him as the only possible, although desperate, remedy.

When the statement was concluded and signed, the detective read it over carefully and pushed it to one side out of reach of the baron's hands, then he said:

"Baron, there is one more point to settle between us before we enter upon the final agreement."

"What is that?" demanded the baron.

"You must answer a few questions that I desire to ask."

The baron nodded his head toward the agreement he had just signed, and replied:

"Since I have gone so far as that, senator, I need not hesitate to answer any questions you may ask. My position could not be made worse than it is now, and my life is entirely in your hands. I had no idea when I undertook to capture you, and to force you by threats to agree to my plans, that you were the man you are, but I am delighted to find you so, if in the end I can accomplish what I wish."

"I have no doubt of it," said the detective, smiling, "and now are you ready to answer my questions?"

"Yes."

"They refer, baron, to the spy system that you have organized in this country, and particularly in the city of Washington. My questions refer to that, for you know all about it. Are you ready for the questions?"

"Yes," was the distinct reply.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET OF THE SPY SYSTEM.

"You have a thoroughly organized spy system in this country, have you not, baron?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"Who is their master here?"

"I am."

"How many men have you employed?"

"Throughout the country, or only in this city?"

"Both."

"We have more than two thousand men in the country, and about two hundred are in the city of Washington now."

"You have one particular set of spies whose efforts are directed solely to the President himself, have you not?"

"Yes; that is, to the President and the men who surround him immediately."

"And another for the senators, or for such of them as you choose to spy upon, and still another for members of Congress, and so on through the whole gamut of this country's organization, baron?"

"Yes."

"Your system is very complete, is it not?"

"It is the most complete and thorough of any country in the world," replied the baron proudly.

"Did you organize it, baron?"

"I did."

"It is my wish, baron, to understand how that spy system is conducted. It is not necessary here that you should know why I wish to knew it, but I do, and so I will ask you to describe to me how it is that your men have been able to report, for example, a private conversation that I personally held with the President."

The baron laughed softly, and rubbed his hands to-

gether, well pleased, for, now that he had entered upon a description of his methods, the pride in the man over his success and his natural egotism, rose above his fears, and he was in the position of one who saw an opportunity to brag and was glad to make use of it. Such a characteristic has been the undoing of many men.

"My men," he replied, with manifest unction, "are enabled to hear conversations when they cannot detect a sound with their ears."

"That sounds untrue on the face of it," smiled the detective; "I will be glad if you will explain."

"They are enabled, every one of them," said the baron, "to read words from the motions of the lips of the man who utters them."

"Ah, what we call in this country the 'lip-movement.'"

"Precisely."

"Good," said the detective. "Now, for instance, let us refer again to that conversation I had with the President. Doubtless, baron, there are other conversations he has held with other men than me which have likewise been reported to you."

"That is true; we know almost all he says."

"Tell me how you accomplish it."

The baron shrugged his shoulders and put out his hands, palms upward, after the manner of a Frenchman, as he replied:

"The men who are assigned to a specific duty—for example, the President—have only to post themselves where they can see him and observe closely the movements of his lips when he is in conversation with another. For instance, senator, if he is seated at his desk in his own private room, his chair faces the window, and a quarter of a mile away from that window there is a building from the roof of which one may look directly into that room by the aid of powerful glasses. You will observe that the rest is very simple."

"Extremely so," said Nick, "when you know all about it."

"There are other buildings, other heights, and there are even trees, from which these various views may be obtained of the interior of many rooms in the executive mansion and in the different departments. The only difficulty was in locating them originally and in providing glasses that were sufficiently powerful to enable our men to do the work. I could tell you, if I chose, of an extended conversation which the President himself held with three others on the south veranda of the White House some days ago. I know every word of that conversation; every word that was uttered by each man that was present at the time. None of it was of importance to me or to my plans, and you must understand that there is a great deal of this information that we gather by this method which is of no value to us."

"How do you make use of it, then?"

"By giving it out when I think it will benefit me to do so."

"How can such a course possibly benefit you?"

"It benefits me by spreading contention among those who believe they have spoken in confidence. It benefits me by destroying the confidence between two men, as I almost succeeded in disrupting it between yourself and the President, for you must understand that when a secret conference leaks out, as that one did, each of the parties concerned is inclined to look upon the other one with suspicion."

"What an infernal snake in the grass you are, baron!"

"Ah, from one standpoint, that is perhaps true, but from my own, as the creator and the master of a system, I look upon it with pride."

"Doubtless," muttered Nick ironically.

"Is that all, senator?" asked the baron.

"No, I want to be informed about those stations; I want to know how to find them in the future, if necessary, or how to make myself sure that they are properly covered whenever I am engaged in a conference that I would not like to have reported."

"I could not tell you that at the present time," said the baron, "for the reason that my plans and lists with the locations of the stations are all at the house to which you were taken to-night."

"Written out and drawn out carefully in Japanese, I suppose, baron?"

"Yes."

"Very good, my dear sir; I think that'll be about all."

"And now for our agreement, senator."

"I think," said Nick, "there will be no difficulty about that, baron. I shall remove the bonds from your ankles now, and I will assign a place for you to get some sleep here in these rooms. I feel very much in need of it myself. When we awaken in the morning I will take you with me, first, to make a short call, and then we will go together to your house in the country in Virginia to complete whatever arrangements and agreements we have decided to make. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Quite so," said the baron, smiling.

Nick, smiling grimly, undid the bonds from the baron's

feet and showed him into the senator's own sleeping-room, saying that he himself would lie upon the couch until morning, and that he did, although with sleepless eyes and vigilant brain, for he had no intention that Baron Mustushimi should leave him surreptitiously.

But the baron was evidently entirely unsuspicious, for when, a half-hour later, Nick looked into the room he found that the Japanese spy was sleeping as quietly as a child who is conscious of having committed no wrong.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the detective aroused Mustushimi from his sleep, having previously busied himself at the telephone. He had communicated with the White House, and also with a livery, and so it was that when the light breakfast that was brought to them was disposed of, he conducted the baron to a carriage that was waiting outside and stood aside holding the door open in his hand while the baron entered.

The instant that Nick Carter stepped into the carriage beside the Japanese spy, he closed the door after him, and then held himself in readiness to seize upon his companion should the latter make any attempt to escape.

But the baron seemed totally unsuspicious, and remained so, in fact, until the carriage, in driving rapidly through 16th Street, wheeled suddenly into Pennsylvania Avenue and turned into the drive which took them swiftly before the door of the White House.

Even then, it was not until the carriage came to a stop that the baron half-started up with terror plainly depicted in his countenance.

"Where are we going?" he demanded.

But Nick's hand fell heavily upon his shoulder, as the detective exclaimed:

"Be silent, baron, and await results!"

Visibly reassured, although still in terror, the baron permitted himself to be led into the main corridor of the building, where an attendant, with a nod toward the man he believed to be the senator from the West, turned and led the way up the stairs past the door of the East Room, until they passed into that anteroom, where the detective and his companion discovered the President standing before a door and awaiting them in exactly the same position he had occupied upon the occasion of Nick's call there the preceding night. There was a strange smile on the face of the President as he stood aside and permitted the detective and his companion to enter the room, and then he followed them himself, closing the door.

But he stood with his back to it, waiting for the detective to speak.

For a moment Nick smiled upon the baron, who was now visibly in terror, and then, with deft and lightning-like touches, he removed the eyebrows, the wig, and other accessories of the disguise he wore, and stood revealed before the astonished Jap as Nick Carter, the detective, and as the latter staggered backward and seized a chair to support himself, Nick turned quickly and addressed the President.

"Mr. President," he said, "this is the chief of the spy system that has annoyed you. He is Baron Mustushimi, and is sent here by his party in Japan for purposes which are fully explained by this paper, signed by him, which I now hand to you."

The baron, his complexion turned to the color of ashes, sank breathlessly upon his chair, while the President took the paper and read it quickly to the end; then, folding it and laying it calmly upon his desk, he spoke, addressing himself to Mustushimi.

"Baron," he said, "this is a very grave matter that has been brought to my attention. I scarcely know how to talk to you at all. Your imperial master has my respect. Your countrymen have always won my esteem, and I must regard this plot, in which you seem to be the prime factor, as the machinations of a set of politicians in your own country, rather than the act of the country itself, and so I say to you now: Yonder is the door, go; leave this country and take with you every one of the spies you have introduced here. Do this, and the matter ends here and now, but if you remain in this country, or permit this system of espionage to continue even in the slightest degree, there will be grave consequences. You may go now, baron."

The President and the detective watched the little man as he slunk like a coyote from the room, and then the great man turned to the detective and extended his hand toward him, saying:

"Mr. Carter, I want to thank you, not for what you have done for me, but for the service you have rendered your country."

That evening Nick Carter and the senator from the West dined alone with the President.

THE END.

The next number (563) of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain, in addition to the usual departments, a long, thrilling, and complete story, entitled: "The Great Spy System; or, Nick Carter's Promise to the President."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

If you are swimming in the breakers, reflect that the approaching wave, which suddenly looks so high, will certainly lift you to its height before the foamy comber breaks about your ears. And when the passing wave sinks beneath your falling body, have no fear that you will be swallowed in the watery abyss. Nothing more exhausts an ocean swimmer than useless efforts to climb an approaching mountain of water, or to float downward more slowly than the receding wave. You can have your sport with the sea, if you will humor it and let it have its fun with you. But to pit your puny arms against the Atlantic's heavings is to violate the first rules of the game, and pay forfeit, perhaps, with life. The same rule of acquiescence has saved many a man in a tideway, and will save many more.

Perhaps in your joint excess of caution and pride of strength you have dived from your boat against the tide, never doubting that you can get back again. But perhaps your submerged body is swept along with a force you never suspected, and when you have cleared your nostrils and set your face for your backward swim, you suddenly find the water stronger than you. Perhaps you are alone, or your boat is anchored, as a swimmer's boat never should be. Now, if you lose your head, you will presently lose your breath. But, think; though you cannot swim a yard against a tidal torrent, you can swim, perhaps, a mile with it, and the case is hard, indeed, if within that distance you cannot find some source of safety.

These are thoughts for the more or less skilful, who perhaps need them most from the positions in which they place themselves, and who are not incapacitated from thinking for themselves by bewildering and unfamiliar conditions. The wholly inexperienced, it is quite certain, can do no thinking in the water. If any useful counsel could be addressed to them, it would amount to the same as that for a swimmer—humor the water. The water will float very nearly all women and most men in such a position that they can breathe, if the limbs are allowed to sink. But the arms can only be thrust higher than the head at the cost of submerging the nose. In exactly the same way, if one edge of a life-preserver be depressed, its mass will turn as on a pivot, and the opposite edge will rise, without giving much increase of floating-power. Just as nearly the whole body must be submerged to elevate the nose, so a life-preserver must be wholly depressed to give its greatest floating-power. Therefore, a plank or log should be grasped at its middle, and not at its end; but, on the other hand, a boat should be seized at the stern, instead of the middle, unless the object be to roll its gunwales under, and fill it.

These thoughts are obvious to commonplaceness, yet people are more often drowned from ignorance of such simple things, or from neglect of knowledge of them, than from anything mysterious. For instance, wherever there is surf, there is undertow, which is merely the backward rush of water above which an incoming wave piles itself, only to become undertow itself in turn when the next wave tumbles in.

Doubtless, sometimes rocks or shoals make an invincible current. No one should bathe in such a spot. But the undertow of a tolerable bathing-beach is strongest in shallow water. When people are drowned there, they nearly always simply venture beyond their depth, and cannot fairly be said to be dragged to sea. Such simple suggestions as these ought not to be necessary, and would never be offered were it not for repeated object lessons of their necessity. Swimming is such an easy and delightful accomplishment, and water is so necessary a part of every pleasuring, that not to know how to swim is almost to invite drowning. Timid parents might well reflect whether it be better policy to teach their children to swim, or to deny them great pleasure at the cost, perhaps, of death when least suspected.

Attention has recently been called to the fact that the red cedar telegraph-poles are often attacked and rendered useless by the borings of the wood-pecker, which not only uses the pole as a kind of apartment-house, but makes it into a granary, also. Some poles have as many as seven hundred holes, large and small, made in them.

In Natal, South Africa, corresponding trouble has resulted from the ingenuity of a bird whose eggs had hitherto been eaten by snakes. It appears to have struck the birds that the snakes could not climb the smooth poles as easily as they could the trees, and so there has been an emigration to the poles.

It is a singular fact that, since making this change of base, the birds, which had placed the opening of the nest at the bottom, to render entry by the reptile difficult, have now, under the safer condition, reverted to an earlier practise of leaving the orifice in the side.

In is stated that in Brazil the telegraph-wires have suffered from the growth around them of orchids. Similar troubles have been experienced in other tropical regions from the tricks of the monkeys, which have not only used the wires as a free gymnasium, but have tried their best to undo the painful work of the lineman and constructor.

But the monkeys, swinging from the wires by their tails

and cracking cocoanuts on the insulators, find their rivals in some sharpshooting cowboys, who, when feeling especially festive, will ride across the plain at full tilt, aiming as they go at the glittering glass knobs of the telegraph-line, which, of course, soon succumb to a few volleys of this searching nature.

The Islands of Kerguelen were well named by Cook the "Land of Desolation." Their history, however, is not without interest; they were the cause of the rise and fall of a young French admiral of the eighteenth century.

In 1772, the Chevalier de Kerguelen, admiral in the French fleet, discovered these islands. As the exploring-parties sent short distances into the interior of the largest island did not reach the farther coast, De Kerguelen became convinced that he had discovered the great southern continent of which geographers had written much.

He hastened back to France, and petitioned the king so earnestly to take possession of the new land that an expedition was fitted out for that purpose, and placed under De Kerguelen's command.

The land was soon found to be only a group of volcanic islands, and the admiral was forced to return to Paris, and to acknowledge his mistake.

The admiralty, stung by the ridicule of the people, called a court-martial, which decided that De Kerguelen, who was then scarcely thirty years old, must lose his rank, and be imprisoned indefinitely in the Castle of Saumer. He was soon released, but never served again in the navy.

The Kerguelen Islands lie half-way between the Cape of Good Hope and Australia, and south of the route usually taken by vessels. They were visited by Cook in 1776, and later by Ross.

To rid yourself of cramp in the leg when you are swimming, straighten the limb, and bend back the big toe. By so doing you will experience pain, but it is the best way to get out of an awkward situation. If the recipe proves unavailing, lift your leg out of the water and bring it down with a thump. Do this repeatedly. The friction produced will drive away the enemy.

How scarce choir-boys are may be inferred from the fact that one leading New York choirmaster is offering a bonus of five dollars to his boys for every likely newcomer they bring into the choir. If hard pressed for new material, he raises this bonus to ten dollars.

Any boy with a naturally true ear and a clear voice—though it may be weak—can do this work. From nine or ten years, to fifteen years of age, in some cases, their voices are serviceable, unless the reprehensible practise of retaining them as altos is resorted to. The boy alto is so very rare, except in this period of early voice-settling, that most of the larger boy choirs have men altos. Three men altos give sufficient body for a choir of thirty-five. Even the famous choirs are not often larger than this.

Training one of these choirs is more a task for a patient fisherman than for the emotional musician. After the boy voice is caught, it must be gently handled, nursed, and protected; and at the moment when all his faculties are trained for the work, and the boy's imaginative power is developing so that he really interprets as he sings, snap goes the line, and the precious game is lost. Only by keeping up the influx and having boys in all stages of growth can a choirmaster insure against the future. If it were not for this constant change of personnel, the work of a long and well-trained choir of boys would approximate perfection. So nice are their perceptions, so alert do they become, so wonderfully do they acquire the musician's equipment of reading, rhythm, and expression, that it is the greatest satisfaction to work in this field for those who possess the necessary qualities of head and heart.

The average choir-boy is a manly little fellow, with a love of mischief and fair play. An appeal to the generous side of his nature is always successful. The greatest difficulty of a choirmaster is, however, not the training of the boy, but teaching him to take care of his health and voice. How hard a task this is, even when the boys are under constant supervision, any parent will realize. Above all things, a boy loves to shout and make extraordinary noises with his vocal apparatus. Besides, no boy willingly encumbers himself with overcoat or rubbers, nor can he refrain easily from snow-drifts, and puddles.

In old St. Luke's Cathedral, at Portland, Me., twenty years ago, it was a regular custom for a new boy to be initiated by ducking him in a snow-drift after his first rehearsal in winter. In summer other customs equally disadvantageous to the voice prevailed. With what tremors the new boy, after delaying as long as possible, started through the dark cloister, on either side of him the huge Maine drifts, in front of him a hidden group of ominously quiet "old-boys." The chorus of shouts and yells, a rush, and a push, and over the rail the neophyte went down ten feet into a six-foot drift. This memory will always have its thrill and ecstasy.

According to the residents of Hop Hollow, Mo., the locusts which infested that valley for several weeks and made such a noise that conversation was impossible, except with considerable vocal effort, have disappeared. The Alton Butchers' Association held a picnic there, and the Alton Maennerchor sang, and the White Hussars Band played several open-air concerts. From that time, the Hop Hollow residents say, the song of the locust in the valley has been silenced.

If anybody doubts this story he need only call on Captain Meisner, of the good ship *Allegheny*, of the Atlas service of the Hamburg-American line. It's all about a shark that was caught on a line by Third Officer Baulka just off the port of Jeremie, Haiti, wherever that may be.

"Well, sir," said Captain Meisner, deftly shifting his quid to the port side of his face, "I reckon that was the dad burndest biggest shark as ever ate a sailorman. We was makin' good time, and everything shipshape, when Baulka calls out to me to come quick to the after-rail.

"I run down from the bridge, and there he was with his line clewed round the rail, and holdin' on for dear life. The next thing I see was that shark he had hooked jump out of the water. He jumped up, seemed to me, like forty feet in the air, and then down he went with a big plunk.

"Ye can believe me or not, but I say that the next thing I knew the ship was making headway backward, as I may say. Yes, siree, that blamed shark just put on a full head of steam and began towing us out toward the middle of the Carib. I reckon we was makin' 'bout ten knots, as the crawfish goes, when Mr. Shark comes up top once more, to see how things was comin', and take his reckonin'.

"If that blamed rascal of a shark didn't actually laugh when he saw what he was doin' to the ship, then I'm a Demmycrat and a landlubber, and never spliced a rope in my sixty years. It made me so durned mad I ran and got my gun, and the next time he showed his forward part, I jest plugged him where he lived, and the next thing he knew he didn't know nothin'.

"We clewed the line round the winch, and hauled Mr. Shark on board. Believe me or not, he measured 15 feet, and weighed a trifle above 800 pounds."

Captain Meisner preserved the jaw as an evidence of good faith.

Bowdoinham cats are noted for their sagacity, but it remains for the intelligent feline owned by Mrs. Samuel Donnell, of that Maine town, to cap the climax.

"Our cat has taken a strange place to rear her last kittens. Her children were born in a hen's nest and ever since she has persisted in keeping them there. The queer part of it is the philosophical way in which the hen seems to take the matter.

"When she wants to lay an egg she pecks at the kittens, who are too small to resent it, and if the mother is near she pushes them gently from the nest. Just as soon as the hen has laid her egg the cat grabs the kittens, and puts them in the nest again, and it is no unusual thing for cat, kittens, eggs, and hen to be all together in one glorious mix-up."

A DRUMMER'S STORY.

BY ARTHUR M. WINFIELD.

In the autumn of 1881, I was called upon by the firm of Wells & Carson, wholesale tobacconists, for whom I was then working, to make an extended trip through the western portion of one of our Southern States to look up several matters of business of which, however, as they form no part of my story, I will not take the trouble to mention.

The business necessitated a visit to one Jonas Wilby, a large grower of tobacco, whose plantation was situated midway between the towns of Carson and Downs, which lie nearly ten miles apart.

I arrived in Carson on a Saturday afternoon, at five o'clock, and at once made inquiries as to the best means of reaching my final destination. I found that the stage for Downs had left an hour before, and that there would be no other until six o'clock Monday morning. There were no livery stables established at the place, and diligent search failed to reveal a suitable conveyance.

Not wishing to remain in Carson over Sunday, I decided to leave my baggage at the depot, and walk the distance. So after getting a substantial supper at what was called the hotel—but this, I presume, only by courtesy—I set out just as it was growing dusk.

The road between Carson and Downs, I had been informed by the station master, was almost straight, and that I had to follow it to the fourth cross-road. Then I was to turn to the left, and in five minutes I would come in sight of Jonas Wilby's belongings.

The directions were certainly simple enough, and I did not stop to think that perhaps they would be difficult to follow. I started at a brisk pace, and soon placed a goodly distance between myself and the nearest house in town.

But I soon discovered that I had made a big mistake in thus literally accepting the words of the railroad functionary. What he had called almost straight I was convinced was decidedly crooked, and though there may have been a limited number of what he designated as cross-roads, yet there were innumerable others, some large and some small, which crossed to such obtuse angles that it became extremely difficult to determine which was right and which was wrong.

At length I was compelled to halt to take a mental as well as topographical survey of the situation. I had come to where the road branched into two forks. If the left fork was the main road, then the road to the right was, as I had counted, the fourth cross-road. But if, on the contrary, the right fork was the main road, then I had not reached the branching off place, and must continue on.

As in either case I was to take the road to the right, I started on, resolving to go ahead until a house or another road appeared.

It was now eight o'clock by my watch, and quite dark. Through the tops of the trees which grew on both sides of the road I could see innumerable stars, but these were often hidden by the clouds that were rolling up from the horizon. The moon was slowly ascending, and as it rose it cast many ghostly lights and shadows along my way.

As I advanced I became aware that two persons were approaching from the opposite direction.

At first this knowledge was grateful to me, and I was on the point of making my presence known, when a second thought suggested that possibly the newcomers would not be desirable persons to meet. I knew the region was infested by tramps and other worthless characters, and I had a strong dislike to being waylaid and robbed, if not murdered, by any of them.

Acting on the second thought, I stepped out of sight behind a tree. The moon, perfectly clear for a second, revealed the parties to be two men; one a thick, heavy-set person under the average height, and the other a burly negro.

As they approached, I saw that they carried something between them. The white man was in front, the negro following. On coming opposite to me, I discovered that their joint burden was a rudely fashioned stretcher, on which something was lying, covered by an overcoat.

The discovery filled me with dismay. I asked myself what these two men could be doing with a corpse at this hour of the night. Not being able to give a satisfactory explanation, I remained out of sight to await further developments.

Presently the man in front spoke:

"Come, Pete, don't be laggin'. We've got a right smart step to go yet."

"He's hebbier dan I fought he was, fo' suah. Golly! won't dar be a row wen da finds out as somebody has killed him."

"Waal, I reckon they won't know who. Leas'wise, ef you know enough to keep yer clapper atween yer teeth."

"Oh, dun you gone feard about dat! Dis chile'll be mum as the grabe."

"'Tain't such a bad thing to do, anyhow. Ef I understand matters, he's better off dead nor alive. He was allers a-pokin' his nose whar he wusn't wanted, an' such as that desarves what they git. He never raised his head arfter the fust crack, an' the shot did him up chuck."

And with these words they passed out of hearing.

This conversation made a deep impression upon me. Who were these two men? Whom had they murdered? Was it not my duty to find out, even though it be at my personal peril, and bring them to justice?

I decided that it was, and determined to follow them. I stepped cautiously out from my place of concealment, and by skulking along behind trees and bushes managed to follow them without being seen. The clouds, which occasionally drifted across the face of the moon, helped me, and when the men stopped, which was five minutes later, I was near enough to distinguish their voices.

The place selected was a small opening near the forks in the road. It was a desolate spot, well adapted for any secret or nefarious work. A clump of pines grew several yards away, and behind these I crouched down to note what was to follow.

But in this I was partly disappointed. The moon, which had shone more than I had wished for before, now went behind a heavy cloud, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I distinguished even their forms as they moved about.

"Now then, Pete, stretch him out kinder life like," said the thick-set man. "We want ter make it look like as if he'd been shot an' crawled here ter die. Scrape the leaves away, an' we'll put him thar, an' then cover him up a bit."

"Yes, sar. Reckon da'll find him in the mo'nin', wen da gits Blugo on de track," replied the burly negro.

They seemed to be in great haste, for they moved about rapidly, and soon had their work accomplished. Then they departed, the negro remarking as they did so:

"Now, Marse Hardy, how 'bout dat dolla' as I was gwine to git fo' dis job? Reckon I'se dun gone earnt it, don't you?"

They passed out of sight, and I was left alone. The full realization of what I had seen and heard burst upon me, and for the first time I found a cold sweat standing out upon my forehead. I had seen two men, murderers, dispose of the corpse of their victim in the lonely woods. Who their victim was was a mystery to me. His name had not been mentioned. But the names of his assassins, Hardy and Pete, with the features of each, I knew, and could well remember, for the whole of the horrible scene was burnt upon my memory.

For a moment I was perplexed and bewildered, not knowing what to do. My first thought was to uncover the body, and drag it to the road, then return to Carson and inform the police. But this I rejected, for might not the police justice or coroner inquire why I had done so, and if I could not give a satisfactory answer, put me under suspicion?

The cold sweat started anew at the bare thought, and the fear took such a strong hold upon me that I fled from the spot, and went crashing through the bushes to the open road.

What was to be done? Long and earnestly I asked myself that question, and finally decided to return to Carson.

Marking the spot well—doing this with bits of paper strewn promiscuously around—I started on the return.

The distance was considerable, but by rapid walking I covered it in less than an hour. I found the police station situated on a side street. I was lucky to find the chief in, and, excitedly, stated the nature of my call.

"This is an important case," said he, when I had concluded. "I know this fellow Hardy well. He is a selfish, overbearing fellow, who begrudges even a dog his living. He is overseer of the Lamley plantation, and I suppose the negro, Pete, is one of his hands. I will take one of my men with me, and the three of us will go to the spot. I know most every one of importance in the neighborhood, and am pretty sure that I can identify the murdered man."

"But how about the murderers?" I asked. "You are surely not going to let them escape?"

"Oh, no! We will keep our visit a secret, and arrest them as soon as we have examined the body. Come."

He led the way to the outer office, and, arousing one of the men, bade him accompany us.

On the way we stopped at the chief's house. Here he made his negro stable-boy hitch the horse to the two-seated wagon. Then the three of us got in, and drove rapidly to the place where the road divided.

It was pitch dark, the moon having again gone under a heavy cloud. Luckily the negro boy had put a lantern in the wagon, and this we lit to find the paper I had scattered. At length several bits were found. I led the way, the others following.

And now a shuddering sense that cannot be described came over me. I trembled in every limb, and my breath came short and quick. What was this awful fear? Was it the forewarning to some horrible sight which my nerves would not be able to bear?

Overcome by the intensity of my emotions, I deposited the lantern on the ground, and stood to one side. The little mound covered by dried leaves was before us. I did not have the strength to uncover it. The chief did so. The black and distorted body lay revealed.

It was that of a Newfoundland dog.

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